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THE

MARTYR OF ANTIOCH:

A DRAMATIC POEM.

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INTRODUCTION.

This poem is founded on the following part of the History of Saint Margaret. She was the daughter of a heathen priest, and beloved by Olybius, the Prefect of the East, who wished to marry her. The rest of the legend I have thought myself at liberty to discard, and to fill up the outline as my own imagination suggested. Gibbon has so well condensed all the information which remains to us from Strabo, Chrysostom, Sozomen, and the writings of Julian the Apostate, relative to Antioch, the Temple and sacred grove of Daphne, that the reader will be able to comprehend from his florid, and too glowing description, most of the allusions to these subjects contained in the poem. The passage occurs in his twenty-third chapter.

The martyrologists have dwelt almost exclusively on the outward and bodily sufferings of the early Christians. They have described with almost anatomical precision the various methods of torture. The consequence has been, the neglect of their writings; in perusing which a mind of the least sensibility shrinks with such loathing and abhorrence from the tedious detail of suffering, as to become insensible to the calm resignation, the simple devotion, the exulting hope of the sufferer. But these writers have rarely and briefly noticed the internal and mental agonies to which the same circumstances inevitably exposed the converts. The surrender of life, when it appeared most highly gifted with the blessings of Providence; the literal abandonment of this world, when all its pleasures, its riches, and its glories were in their power; the violent severing of those ties, which the gentle spirit of Christianity had the more endeared; the self-denial not of the ungodly

lusts, but of the most innocent affections; that last and most awful conflict, when "brother delivered brother unto death, and the father the child," when "a man's foes were those of his own household,"—it was from such trials, not those of the fire and the stake alone, that the meek religion of Christ came forth triumphant. In such a situation it has been my object to represent the mind of a young and tender female; and I have opposed to Christianity the most beautiful and the most natural of Heathen superstitions—the worship of the Sun. The reader, it is to be hoped, will recollect that although the following poem is in most part a work of imagination, there were multitudes who really laid down their lives for the faith of Christ, under circumstances equally appalling and afflictive; for that faith, to the truth or falsehood of which they had demonstrative evidence in their power and in their possession.

NOTE.

Page 89, stanzas 4 and 5, from a beautiful fragment of Mimnermus. Poet. Min. Græci. Edit. Gaisford. Vol. i. page 423.

Ἠέλιος μὲν γὰρ ἔλαχεν πονον ηματα παντα,
Οὐδε ποτ' ἄμπαυσις γίνεται ὐδεμία
ἵπποισιν τε καὶ αὐτῷ, επην ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠὼς
ὠκεανὸν προλιπῦς' οὐρανὸν εἰσαναβῆ·
τὸν μεν γὰρ διὰ κῦμα φέρει πολυήρατος ευνὴ
κοιλη, Ηφαίστου χερσὶν εληλαμένη
χρυσοῦ τιμηέντος, ὑπόπτερος, ἄκρον ἐφ' ὕδωρ
ἐυδονθ' ἁρπαλέως, χώρου αφ' Ἐσπερίδων,
γαῖαν ἐς Αιθίοπων· ἵνα ὁι θοὸν ἅρμα καὶ ἵπποι
εστᾶς', ὄφρ' Ἠὼς ἠριγένεια μόλη·
ἔνθ' ἐπέβη ἑτέρων ὀχέων Ὑπερίονος υἱος——

THE MARTYR OF ANTIOCH.

CHARACTERS.

Olybius, Prefect of the East.
Vopiscus.
Macer, Governor of the City.
Callias, Priest of Apollo.

Fabius, Bishop of Antioch.
Diodotus,
Charinus, } *Christians.*
Calanthias,

Officers.
Citizens.
Christians.
A Shepherd.

Margarita, daughter of Callias.
Maidens of Antioch.

SCENE—Antioch in the reign of the Emperor Probus.

THE MARTYR OF ANTIOCH.

SCENE—The Front of the Temple of Apollo, in the Daphne near Antioch.

OLYBIUS, MACER, *Romans, Citizens of Antioch,* CALLIAS, *Priests.*

CHORUS OF YOUTHS.

LORD of the golden day!
That hold'st thy fiery way,
Out-dazzling from the heavens each waning star;
What time Aurora fair
With loose dew-dropping hair,
And the swift Hours have yoked thy radiant car.

Thou mountest Heaven's blue steep,
And the universal sleep
From the wide world withdraws its misty veil;
The silent cities wake,
Th' encamped armies shake
Their unfurl'd banners in the freshening gale.

The basking earth displays
Her green breast in the blaze;
And all the Gods upon Olympus' head,
In haughty joy behold
Thy trampling coursers bold
Obey thy sovereign rein with stately tread.

CHORUS OF MAIDENS.

Lord of the speaking lyre!
That with a touch of fire
Strik'st music, which delays the charmed spheres;
And with a soft control
Dost steal away the soul,
And draw from melting eyes delicious tears—

Thou the dead hero's name
Dost sanctify to fame,
Embalm'd in rich and ever-fragrant verse;
In every sunlit clime,
Through all eternal time
Assenting lands his deathless deeds rehearse.

The lovesick damsel, laid
Beneath the myrtle shade,
Drinks from thy cup of song with raptured ear,
And, dead to all around,
Save the sweet bliss of sound,
Sits heedless that her soul's beloved is near.

CHORUS OF YOUTHS.

Lord of the unerring bow,
Whose fateful arrows go
Like shafts of lightning from the quivering string:
Pierced through each scaly fold,
Enormous Python roll'd,
While thou triumphant to the sky didst spring;

And scorn and beauteous ire
Steep'd with ennobling fire
Thy quivering lip and all thy beardless face;
Loose flew thy clustering hair,
While thou the trackless air
Didst walk in all thine own celestial grace.

CHORUS OF MAIDENS.

Lord of the holy spring,
Where the Nine Sisters sing,
Their dearest haunt, our Syrian Castaly:
There oft the entranced maid,
By the cool waters laid,
Feels all her labouring bosom full of thee:

The kings of earth stand near
In pale religious fear;
The purple Sovereign of imperial Rome
In solemn awe hath heard
The wild prophetic word,
That spake the cloud-wrapt mystery of his doom.

CHORUS OF YOUTHS.

Lord of the gorgeous shrine,
Where to thy form divine
The snow-white line of lessening pillars leads:
And all the frontispiece,
And every sculptured frieze,
Is rich and breathing with thy godlike deeds.

Here by the lulling deep
Thy mother seems to sleep
On the wild margin of the floating isle;
Her new-born infants, thou,
And she the wood-Nymph now,
Lie slumbering on her breast, and slumbering smile.

Here in her pride we see
The impious Niobe,
Mid all her boasted race in slaughter piled,
Folding in vain her vest,
And cowering with fond breast
Over her last, her youngest, loveliest child.

CHORUS OF MAIDENS.

Lord of the cypress grove,
That here in baffled love
The soft Thessalian maid didst still pursue;
Until her snowy foot
In the green earth took root,
And in thine arms a verdant laurel grew.

And still thy tenderest beams
Over our falling streams
At shadowy eve delight to hover long;
They to Orontes' tide
In liquid music glide
Through banks that blossom their sweet course along.

And still in Daphne's bower
Thou wanderest many an hour,
Kissing the turf by her light footsteps trod;
And Nymphs at noontide deep
Start from their dreaming sleep,
And in his glory see the bright-hair'd God.

CHORUS OF YOUTHS AND MAIDENS.

Phœbus Apollo, hear!
Great Lycian king appear,
Come from thy Cynthian steep or Xanthus' shore,
Here to thy Syrian home
In visible godhead come,
And o'er our land thy choicest influence pour.

CALLIAS.

Break off the hymn. And now the solemn rites
Are duly paid; the hundred steers have bled;
O'er all the Temple the rich incense curls
In clouds of fragrance; and the golden cups
In generous libation have pour'd forth
The honied wine; and all along the shade
Of sacred Daphne hath your pomp been led,
Waking the slumbering echoes from their caves,
To multiply the adoring Io Pæan
To great Apollo.

SECOND PRIEST.

Callias! our God,

That yesterday on our Elean games
Shone with a splendour, even as though a veil,
Which to that day had dimm'd his full divinity,
Had been rent off; our God hath center'd now
As 'twere the gather'd light of many noons
Within his orb to honour this our festival.

MACER.

Nor wonder! for did ever elder Greece,
When all her cities and her kings were met
On the Olympic plain, or where the priestess
Sate, speaking fate, upon her Delphic tripod,
With richer rite, or statelier ceremony,
With nobler or more spotless hecatombs,
Propitiate the immortal Gods?

OLYBIUS.

Great Rome

Herself not costlier.

MACER.

What, then, is wanting?

SECOND PRIEST.

What, but the crown and palm-like grace of all,
The sacred virgin, on whose footsteps Beauty
Waits like a handmaid; whose most peerless form,
Light as embodied air, and pure as ivory
Thrice polish'd by the skilful statuary,
Moves in the priestess' long and flowing robes,
While our scarce-erring worship doth adore
The servant rather than the God.

THIRD PRIEST.

The maid
Whose living lyre so eloquently speaks,
From the deserted grove the silent birds
Hang hovering o'er her; and we human hearers
Stand breathless as the marbles on the walls,
That even themselves seem touch'd to listening life,
All animate with the inspiring ecstasy.

FIRST ROMAN.

Thou mean'st the daughter of the holy Callias;
I once beheld her, when the thronging people

Prest round, yet parted still to give her way,
Even as the blue enamour'd waves, when first
The sea-born Goddess in her rosy shell
Sail'd the calm ocean.

SECOND PRIEST.

Margarita, come,
Come in thy zoneless grace, thy flowing locks
Crown'd with the laurel of the God; the lyre
Accordant to thy slow and musical steps,
As grateful 'twould return the harmony,
That from thy touch it wins.

THIRD PRIEST.

Come, Margarita.
This long, this bashful, timorous delay
Beseems thee well, and thou wilt come the lovelier,
Even like a late long-look'd for flower in spring.

SECOND PRIEST.

Still silent! some one of the sacred priests
Enter, and in Apollo's name call forth
The tardy maiden.

CALLIAS.

Shame upon the child,
That thus will make th' assembled lords of Antioch,
And sovereign Rome's imperial Prefect, wait
Her wayward pleasure.

FOURTH PRIEST (*returning from within.*)

Callias!

CALLIAS.

Ha! what now?—

FOURTH PRIEST.

Callias!

CALLIAS.

Hath lightning smitten thee to silence?
Or hath some sinister and angry sign,
The bleeding statue of the god, or birds
Obscene within the secret sanctuary,
Appall'd thee?

FOURTH PRIEST.

In the holy place we sought her;
Trampled in dust we found the laurel crown,

The lyre unstrung cast down upon the pavement,
And the dishonour'd robes of prophecy
Scatter'd unseemly here and there—and——

CALLIAS.

What?

FOURTH PRIEST.

And Margarita was not there.

CALLIAS.

Not there!

My child not there! Prefect Olybius,
This is thy deed—I knew that thou didst love her,
And mine old heart was proud to see thee stand
Before her presence, awed; the sovereign lord
Of Asia, Rome's renown'd and consular captain,
Awed by my timid, blushing child; whom now
His Roman soul hath nobly dared to rend
From her afflicted father.

OLYBIUS.

Holy Callias,

By Mars, my god, thou wrong'st me!

CALLIAS.

Oh, my lord!

Tyrant, not lord! inhuman ravisher!
Dissembling Tarquin!—but it is no fable,
That great Apollo once avenged his priest,
When broke the wasting plague o'er Agamemnon,
And all the myriad ships of Greece.

OLYBIUS.

Old man,
But that thy daughter's unforgotten loveliness
Hallows thy wrath——

CALLIAS.

By Heaven! yet I'll have justice,
If I do travel to the emperor's throne.
I'll raise a cry so loud, that all the palace
In which great Cæsar dwells, the Capitol,
And every stone within the Eternal City,
Shall with my wrongs resound. Ah, fond old man!
My trembling limbs have lost their only stay,
And that sweet voice that utter'd all my wishes,

Reading them in my secret heart within,
Shall never thrill again upon mine ears!
I may go wandering forth another Œdipus,
But with no fond Antigone——

CITIZENS.

Hark! hark!
A trumpet sound! a messenger from Rome.

CALLIAS.

From Rome! from Rome! it is thy doom, destroyer!
The sunbeams have beheld thy deed of shame,
And have proclaim'd it; the arraigning winds
Have blown my injuries and thy disgrace
Over the wide face of the listening earth;
And Cæsar's arm of justice is outstretch'd
To strike and punish!

The above. VOPISCUS.

VOPISCUS.

Great Olybius,
I am the bearer of the emperor's mandate,

Would I might add of wonted thanks and praise.
'Tis said that here in Antioch, the high place
And chosen sanctuary of those Galileans,
Who with their godless and incestuous rites
Offend the thousand deities of Rome,
Making them waste our mildew'd lands with dearth,
Attaint our wholesome airs with pestilence,
And shake th' indignant earth, even till our cities,
With all their unwarn'd multitudes, sink down
Into the sudden yawning chasms beneath them;—
'Tis said, even here Olybius hath let sleep
The thunders of the law, which should have smitten
With the stern frequency of angry Jove,
When with fierce storms he darkens half the world!
Wherefore, instead of flying in close haunts,
And caves, and woods, the stern extermination,
They climb our palaces, they crowd our camps,
They cover all our wide and boundless realms;
While the sad Priests of all our Gods do sit
Round their cold altars and ungifted shrines,
Waiting in vain for victim or oblation.

OLYBIUS.

It moves no wonder that Vopiscus comes
To taunt with negligence Olybius' rule,
Not ignorant that Vopiscus were well pleased
If that this Eastern Prefecture should pass
To abler hands, perchance his own.—To the charge.
It is most true that I have sought to stay
This frenzy, not with angry fire and sword,
But with a lofty and contemptuous mercy,
That scorn'd too much to punish. For my heart
Was sick of seeing beardless youth and age
Wearying the pall'd and glutted executioner;
Exhausting all the subtlest arts of torture
With cheerful patience: even soft maidens moving,
With flower-crown'd locks, and pale but smiling cheeks,
To the consuming fire as to their bridal.
I saw in this wild scorn of death a grandeur
Worthy a nobler cause; 'twas Roman virtue,
Though not for Roman glory. But, Vopiscus,
I am not one that wears a subject's duty
Loose and cast off whene'er the changeful will

Would clothe itself in sole authority.
The edict of the Emperor is to me
As the unrepealed word of fate. To death
It doth devote these Christians, and to death
My voice shall doom them. Not Vopiscus self,
Whom I invite to share my stern tribunal,
But shall confess th' obedience of Olybius.

THE PEOPLE.

Long live the Christians' scourge!—long live Olybius!
Haste, drag them forth, the accursed of our gods.

SECOND PRIEST.

She comes—she is here—the beauteous Margarita.

CALLIAS.

My child! and thou art breathing still!—Come back
Unto my desolate heart—thy father, child——
These choking tears! they would not flow but now.

MARGARITA.

Dear father!

CALLIAS.

But, sweet daughter, how is this,
Upon our solemn day of festival,

Thus darkly clad, and on thy close-bound locks
Ashes, and sackcloth on thy tender limbs?

MARGARITA.

I thought the rites had been o'erpass'd ere now,
Or——

CALLIAS.

Hath the god afflicted thee, my child?

MARGARITA.

My God, indeed, afflicts me, father.

OLYBIUS.

Priests!
We mourn, that we must leave th' imperfect rites,
Deeply we mourn it, when bright Margarita
Vouchsafes her late and much-desired presence.
So on to-morrow for our Judgment Hall.
Let all the fires be kindled, and bring forth
The long disused racks, and fatal engines.
Their rust must be wash'd off in blood. Proclaim
That every guilty worshipper of Christ
Be dragg'd before us.—Ha!——

MACER.

What frantic cry
With insolent interruption breaks upon
Rome's Prefect?

MANY VOICES.

Lo the priestess! Lo the priestess!

SECOND PRIEST.

She hath fall'n down upon her knees; her hair
Is scatter'd like a cloud of gold; her hands
Are clasp'd across her swelling breast; her eyes
Do hold a sad communion with the heavens,
And her lips move, yet make no sound.

THIRD PRIEST.

Haste—haste—
The laurel crown—the laurel of the God—
She 's wrapt—possess'd!

MARGARITA.

The crown—the crown of glory—
God give me grace upon my bleeding brows
To wear it.

SECOND PRIEST.

She is distracted by our gaze—
She shrinks and trembles. Lead her in, the trance
Will pass anon, and her unsealed lips
Pour forth the mystic numbers, that men hear,
And feel the inspiring deity.

OLYBIUS.

On—away!

THE PEOPLE.

Long live the Christians' scourge!—long live Olybius!

CHORUS AROUND THE TEMPLE.

Phœbus Apollo hear,
Great Lycian king appear,
Come from thy Cynthian steep, or Xanthus' shore;
Here to thy Syrian home,
In visible godhead come,
And o'er our land thy choicest influence pour.

CHORUS ROUND OLYBIUS.

Go on thy flow'r-strewn road,
The champion of our god,
By Phœbus' self his chosen chief confess'd;
His brightest splendours bask
Upon thy glowing casque,
And gild the waving glories of thy crest.

The Grove of Daphne.

Evening.

MARGARITA.

My way is through the dim licentious Daphne,
And evening darkens round my stealthful steps;
Yet I must pause to rest my weary limbs.
Oh, thou polluted, yet most lovely grove!
Hath the Almighty breathed o'er all thy bowers
An everlasting spring, and paved thy walks
With amaranthine flowers—are but the winds,
Whose breath is gentle, suffer'd to entangle
Their light wings, not unwilling prisoners,
In thy thick branches, there to make sweet murmurs
With the bees' hum, and melodies of birds,
And all the voices of the hundred fountains,
That drop translucent from the mountain's side,
And lull themselves along their level course
To slumber with their own soft-sliding sounds;

And all for foul idolatry, or worse,
To make itself an home and sanctuary?
Oh, second Eden, like the first, defiled
With sin! even like thy human habitants,
Thy winds and flowers and waters have forgot
The gracious hand that made them, ministers
Voluptuous to man's transgressions—all,
Save thou, sweet nightingale! that, like myself,
Pourest alone thy melancholy song
To silence and to God——not undisturb'd—
The velvet turf gives up a quickening sound
Of coming steps:—Oh, thou that lov'st the holy,
Protect me from the sinful—from myself!
'Twas what I fear'd—Olybius!

Olybius, Margarita.

OLYBIUS.

Margarita,
I heard but now that thou hadst wander'd hither,
And follow'd thee, my love.

MARGARITA.

My lord, mine haste
Brooks no delay.

OLYBIUS.

What sudden speed is this?
Behold the Sun, our God——

MARGARITA.

Not so, my lord.

OLYBIUS.

What! thou'rt become a tender worshipper
Of yon pale crescent, that alone in heaven
Breathes o'er the world her cold serenity.
Trust me, my sweet, it is a barren service.

MARGARITA.

My lord, I do beseech you let me pass,
I have nor time nor wish——

OLYBIUS.

Ha, Margarita!
At this luxurious hour, when all is mute
But the fond lover at his mistress' ear,

Through the dusk grove, where every conscious tree
Bears in its bark the record of fond vows
And amorous service——

MARGARITA.

Hath the Prefect seen
Ought loose in Callias' daughter, ought unholy,
That he would breathe suspicion's tainting blight
On the pure lily of her fame?

OLYBIUS.

Ungrateful!
I have endured this day for thee the taunts
Of thy distracted sire; but will not bear
The thought, that thou art hurrying hence to hear
Some favour'd lover pour into thy soul——

MARGARITA.

Olybius, thou dost not truly think it—
I had forgot——Lord Prefect, thou art tyrannous,
That thus with harsh and most untimely violence
Imped'st my way.

OLYBIUS.

Fond maiden, know'st thou not
That I am clothed with power? my word, my sign
May drag to death, whoe'er presumes to love
Th' admired of great Olybius.

MARGARITA (*apart*).

My full heart!
And hath it not a guilty pleasure still
In being so fondly, though so sternly chided?

OLYBIUS.

Hear me, I say, but weep not, Margarita,
Though thy bright tears might diadem the brow
Of Juno, when she walks th' Olympian clouds.
My pearl! my pride! thou know'st my soul is thine—
Thine only! On the Parthians' fiery sands
I look'd upon the blazing noontide sun,
And thought how lovely thou before his shrine
Wast standing with thy laurel-crowned locks.
And when my high triumphal chariot toil'd
Through Antioch's crowded streets, when every hand

Rain'd garlands, every voice dwelt on my name,
My discontented spirit panted still
For thy long silent lyre.

MARGARITA.

Oh! let me onward,
Nor hold me thus, nor speak thus fondly to me.

OLYBIUS.

Thou strivest still to leave me; go then, go,
My soul disdains to force what it would win
With the soft violence of favour'd love.
But ah, to-day—to-day—what meant thine absence
From the proud worship of thy God? what mean
Thy wild and mournful looks, thy bursting eyes
So full of tears, that weep not?—Margarita,
Thou wilt not speak—farewell, then, and forgive
That I have dared mistrust thee:—No, even now,
Even thus I'll not believe but thou art pure,
As the first dew that Dian's early foot
Treads in her deepest, holiest shade.—Farewell!

MARGARITA.

I should have told him all, yet dared not tell him—
I could not deeper wound his generous heart
Than it endures already. My Redeemer,
If weakly thus before the face of man
I have trembled to confess thee, yet, oh Lord,
Before thine angels do not thou deny me.
And yet, he is not guilty yet, oh Saviour,
Of Christian blood! Preserve him in thy mercy,
Preserve him from that sin.—Ah, lingering still,
While lives of thousands hang upon my speed,
Away!

The Burial Place of the Christians.

Night.

FABIUS, DIODOTUS, CHARINUS, CALANTHIAS, &c.

FUNERAL ANTHEM.

Brother, thou art gone before us, and thy saintly soul is flown
Where tears are wiped from every eye, and sorrow is unknown;
From the burthen of the flesh, and from care and fear released,
Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

The toilsome way thou'st travelled o'er, and borne the heavy load,
But Christ hath taught thy languid feet to reach his blest abode.

Thou'rt sleeping now, like Lazarus upon his father's
breast,
Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary
are at rest.

Sin can never taint thee now, nor doubt thy faith assail,
Nor thy meek trust in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit
fail.
And there thou'rt sure to meet the good, whom on earth
thou lovedst best,
Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary
are at rest.

"Earth to earth," and "dust to dust," the solemn priest
hath said,
So we lay the turf above thee now, and we seal thy nar-
row bed:
But thy spirit, brother, soars away among the faithful
blest,
Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary
are at rest.

And when the Lord shall summon us, whom thou hast
left behind,
May we, untainted by the world, as sure a welcome
find;
May each, like thee, depart in peace, to be a glorious
guest,
Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary
are at rest.

FABIUS.

So, by the side of martyr'd Babylas,
Brother, thou slumberest; silent as yon stars,
And silent as the falling dews around thee,
We leave thy verdant grave. But oh! shall we,
When we put off the load of mortal life,
Depart like thee as in a deeper sleep,
With the sweet smile of life on the closed lips,
Or in an agony of mortal pain,
By the pitch'd stake, or den of raging lions?

The above. MARGARITA.

MARGARITA.

I'm here at last before them, and ye live.

FABIUS.

What means the gentle Neophyte?

MARGARITA.

Good sir,

Thou hast not heard——Hark—hark! they are behind me.

FABIUS.

Who, maiden, who?

MARGARITA.

The Prefect's ruthless soldiers;

They come to drag us to their Judgment Hall.

Already is the scourge prepared; the dungeons

Ope their expecting gates; the outpour'd city

Pants for the spectacle.

FABIUS.

Is it so, my child?

Makes the fierce Heathen bloody preparation

For slaughter—then must we for death. His zeal
Doth furbish up his armoury of murder;
We, ours of patience. We must gird around us
Heaven's panoply of faith and constancy,
And so go forth to war.

MARGARITA.

Alas! alas!
If they should take thee—thee, upon whose lips
The living fire of inspiration burns,
Severing by gentle force the willing spirit
From this low earth, and pluming it for heaven;
That makes the conscious immortality
Stir in our souls, and pant for that pure life
With Christ beyond the grave. Oh, thou that teachest
Our charities to flow in heaven's own light,
Like some bright river in the desert sands,
Round which the gladdening pilgrims sing for joy;
That send'st us forth to pour sweet oil and wine
Into the bleeding wounds; to take our seat
By the sick couch; to shed a tender health

On the pale prisoner's cheek—Oh, who shall lead
The foldless sheep to life's eternal pastures
When their good shepherd's gone?

FABIUS.

Hast thou forgot
The Master of the flock?

MARGARITA.

Oh, no—no—no—
But how shall I endure to see thy head,
Thy venerable head, bow'd down to scorn?
I have call'd thee father, and have fondly pray'd
That mine own parent were like thee; and now
I must behold thy blood flow drop by drop
Beneath the knotted scourge, or hungry fires
Preying upon thy shuddering flesh.

FABIUS.

My child,
Think thou each lash that rends my bleeding skin
A beauteous sign of brotherhood with Christ;
That the pale fire which wastes my perishing flesh
Is heaven's own lambent glory gathering round me.

CHARINUS.

Why now, most holy Fabius, I had look'd
For joy and triumph on thy brow, to hear
That we may mount the everlasting heavens
In those angelic chariots, wont to wrap
The Martyr's spirit. Lo! the eternal gates
Lift up their heads to greet us! Shall we then
Waver and pause? or shall we not go forth
Through all the city to the Roman's throne
Hymning our Christ, and calling on our heads
The glorifying axe?

CALANTHIAS.

Away! I see
The waving of the purple robe. The Lord
Shall tread even now the wine-press in his wrath;
The signs are labouring forth, the latter days
Run to their dregs. He comes t' avenge his own.
No more, no more, your vain and baffled songs,
"Holy and True, how long?" ascend to heaven—
The day of vintage, and the day of dread,

The day of desolation is at hand,
The day of vengeance!

FABIUS.

Cease, Calanthias, cease;
And thou, Charinus. Oh, my brethren, God
Will summon those whom he hath chosen, to sit
In garments dyed with their own blood around
The Lamb in Heaven; but it becomes not man
To affect with haughty and aspiring violence
The loftiest thrones, ambitious for his own,
And not his Master's glory. Every star
Is not a sun, nor every Christian soul
Wrapt to a seraph. But for thee, Calanthias,
Thou know'st not whether even this night shall burst
The impatient vengeance of the Lord, or rest
Myriads of human years. For what are they,
What are our ages, but a few brief waves
From the vast ocean of eternity,
That break upon the shore of this our world,
And so ebb back into the immense profound,

Which He on high, even at one instant, sweeps
With his omniscient sight

Beloved brethren,

And ye, our sisters, hold we all prepared,
Like him beside whose hallow'd grave we stand,
To give the last and awful testimony
To Christ our Lord. Yet tempt not to our murder
The yet unbloody hands of men.

They come:

Pale lights are gleaming through the dusky night,
And hurrying feet are trampling to and fro.
Disperse—disperse, my brethren, to your homes!—
Sweet Margarita, in the Hermitage
By clear Orontes, where so oft we've met,
Thou'lt find me still. God's blessing wait on all!
Farewell! we meet, if not on earth, in heaven.

The Front of the Temple.

Day-break.

MARGARITA.

Yet once again I touch thy golden strings,
My silent and forgotten lyre, oh! erst
The joy of Antioch, when on festal days
At the proud idol's foot I sate; and all,
Even as thy raptures rose and fell, bow'd down
Or stood erect before the shrine. I, too,
Like thee, was hallow'd to an impious service,
Even till a touch from heaven waked my soul's music,
And pour'd it forth in ecstasy to him
Who died for men. And shalt not thou, my partner
In mine unholy worship, mingle now
Thy sweetness with my purer vows. Oh! fountain
Of sounds delicious, shall I not unseal thee,
Thou that didst flow through Daphne's flowery grove,

Timing the dancing steps of youths and maids?
Dwell not within thy secret wreathed shell
Sounds full of chaste and holy melancholy
As ever mourn'd in angels' moonlight chants
O'er the night-visited graves of buried saints—
Even sounds accordant to the weary steps
Of him, that, loaded with the ponderous cross,
Toil'd up the steep of Calvary?

Callias, Margarita.

CALLIAS.

My child,
My own, my loved, my beauteous child! once more
Thou art thyself; thy snowy hands are trembling
On thy loved lyre, and doubtless thou art hailing
Our God, who from his golden eastern chamber
Begins to dawn. I have commanded all
The ministering priests and sacred virgins
Their robes and verdant chaplets to prepare.
Thou too shalt come, with all thy richest songs

To hymn the triumph of our God around
The pile whereon these frantic Galileans
Writhe and expire.

MARGARITA.

My father!

CALLIAS.

What is this?
Wilt thou not go?

MARGARITA.

Alas! I shall be there
Too surely.

CALLIAS.

Ay, and when thy ivory brows
Are dimly shaded by the laurel crown;
And when thy snowy robes in folds of light
Enwrap thee, like the glittering ocean foam
In which the sea nymph bowers her gliding form;
The God shall make thy breast his shrine, and pour
Such all-enchanting harmony around thee,
Men's senses, spell-bound by their captive hearing,

Shall own the manifest godhead, and bow down
In worship.

MARGARITA.

Ah, that thou and all might know
The God that hath possess'd me—would adore
The eternal words of light and life and truth
That I could utter!

CALLIAS.

Oh my child! my pride!
While the infected daughters of the land
Fall off to this new faith; while they are led
To expiate in the fire their sinful deeds,
How shall I gaze on thee, through Daphne gliding
Amid thy white-robed choir of sacred maids,
Like the presiding swan on smooth Cayster,
And bless Apollo, that hath stamp'd thy soul
His own.

MARGARITA (*apart*).

Ah me! and how t' unbarb the dart,
Which I must strike into his inmost soul!

CALLIAS.

Thrice-dearest of our god!

MARGARITA.

Beloved father!

Those tender maids led forth to sacrifice,
To bear upon their blushing, delicate limbs
Rude stripes and shameful insults, have they not
Fond parents, loving as thyself, whose hearts
Weep blood, more fast than even their flowing wounds?
Oh think on her, thy Margarita, her—
The breathing image thou hast often call'd her
Of thy youth's bride—exposed to pain, to death!
To worse—to nameless shame!

CALLIAS.

When Margarita
Hath from her God revolted, I'll endure
Even that, or more.

MARGARITA.

No, father, no, thou couldst not,
Thou wilt not, when she meets her Christian brethren,

Patient to bear their Master's mournful lot
Of suffering and of death——

CALLIAS.

How? what? mine ears
Ring with a wild confusion of strange sounds
That have no meaning. Thou'rt not wont to mock
Thine aged father, but I think that now
Thou dost, my child.

MARGARITA.

By Jesus Christ—by him
In whom my soul hath hope of immortality,
Father! I mock not.

CALLIAS.

Lightnings blast——not thee,
But those that by their subtle incantations
Have wrought upon thy innocent soul!
Look there!—

MARGARITA.

Father, I'll follow thee where'er thou wilt:
Thou dost not mean this cruel violence
With which thou dragg'st me on.

CALLIAS.

Dost not behold him,
Thy God! thy father's God! the God of Antioch!
And feel'st thou not the cold and silent awe,
That emanates from his immortal presence
O'er all the breathless temple? Dar'st thou see
The terrible brightness of the wrath that burns
On his arch'd brow? Lo, how the indignation
Swells in each strong dilated limb! his stature
Grows loftier; and the roof, the quaking pavement,
The shadowy pillars, all the temple feels
The offended God!—I dare not look again,
Dar'st thou?

MARGARITA.

I see a silent shape of stone,
In which the majesty of human passion
Is to the life express'd. A noble image,
But wrought by mortal hands, upon a model
As mortal as themselves.

CALLIAS.

Ha! look again, then,

There in the East. Mark how the purple clouds
Throng to pavilion him: the officious winds
Pant forth to purify his azure path
From night's dun vapours and fast-scattering mists.
The glad earth wakes in adoration; all
The voices of all animate things lift up
Tumultuous orisons; the spacious world
Lives but in him, that is its life. But he,
Disdainful of the universal homage,
Holds his calm way, and vindicates for his own
Th' illimitable heavens, in solitude
Of peerless glory unapproachable.
What means thy proud undazzled look, to adore
Or mock, ungracious?

MARGARITA.

On yon burning orb
I gaze, and say,—Thou mightiest work of him
That launch'd thee forth, a golden-crowned bridegroom,
To hang thy everlasting nuptial lamp
In the exulting heavens. In thee the light,

Creation's eldest born, was tabernacled.
To thee was given to quicken slumbering nature,
And lead the seasons' slow vicissitude
Over the fertile breast of mother earth;
Till men began to stoop their groveling prayers
From the Almighty Sire of all to thee.
And I will add,—Thou universal emblem,
Hung in the forehead of the all-seen heavens,
Of him, that with the light of righteousness
Dawn'd on our latter days; the visitant dayspring
Of the benighted world. Enduring splendour!
Giant refresh'd! that evermore renew'st
Thy flaming strength; nor ever shalt thou cease,
With time coeval, even till Time itself
Hath perish'd in eternity. Then thou
Shalt own, from thy apparent deity
Debased, thy mortal nature, from the sky
Withering before the all-enlightening Lamb,
Whose radiant throne shall quench all other fires.

CALLIAS.

And yet she stands unblasted! In thy mercy
Thou dost remember all my faithful vows,
Hyperion! and suspend the fiery shaft
That quivers on thy string. Ah, not on her,
This innocent, wreak thy fury! I will search,
And thou wilt lend me light, although they shroud
In deepest Orcus. I will pluck them forth,
And set them up a mark for all thy wrath;
Those that beguiled to this unholy madness
My pure and blameless child. Shine forth, shine forth,
Apollo, and we'll have our full revenge!

MARGARITA.

'Tis over now—and oh, I bless thee, Lord,
For making me thus desolate below;
For severing one by one the ties that bind me
To this cold world, for whither can earth's outcasts
Fly but to heaven?
Yet is no way but this,
None but to steep my father's lingering days

In bitterness? Thou knowest, gracious Lord
Of mercy, how he loves me, how he loved me
From the first moment that my eyes were open'd
Upon the light of day and him. At least,
If thou must smite him, smite him in thy mercy.
He loves me as the life-blood of his heart,
His love surpasses every love but thine.

HYMN.

For thou didst die for me, oh Son of God!
By thee the throbbing flesh of man was worn;
Thy naked feet the thorns of sorrow trod,
And tempests beat thy houseless head forlorn.
Thou, that wert wont to stand
Alone, on God's right hand,
Before the Ages were, the Eternal, eldest born.

Thy birthright in the world was pain and grief,
Thy love's return ingratitude and hate;
The limbs thou healedst brought thee no relief,
The eyes thou openedst calmly view'd thy fate:

Thou, that wert wont to dwell
In peace, tongue cannot tell,
Nor heart conceive the bliss of thy celestial state.

They dragg'd thee to the Roman's solemn Hall,
Where the proud Judge in purple splendour sate;
Thou stoodst a meek and patient criminal,
Thy doom of death from human lips to wait;
Whose throne shall be the world
In final ruin hurl'd,
With all mankind to hear their everlasting fate.

Thou wert alone in that fierce multitude,
When "Crucify him!" yell'd the general shout;
No hand to guard thee mid those insults rude,
Nor lip to bless in all that frantic rout;
Whose lightest whisper'd word
The Seraphim had heard,
And adamantine arms from all the heavens broke out.

They bound thy temples with the twisted thorn,
Thy bruised feet went languid on with pain;
The blood, from all thy flesh with scourges torn,
Deepen'd thy robe of mockery's crimson grain;
Whose native vesture bright
Was the unapproached light,
The sandal of whose foot the rapid hurricane.

They smote thy cheek with many a ruthless palm,
With the cold spear thy shuddering side they pierced;
The draught of bitterest gall was all the balm
They gave, t' enhance thy unslaked, burning thirst:
Thou, at whose words of peace
Did pain and anguish cease,
And the long buried dead their bonds of slumber burst.

Low bow'd thy head convulsed, and, droop'd in death,
Thy voice sent forth a sad and wailing cry;
Slow struggled from thy breast the parting breath,
And every limb was wrung with agony.

That head, whose veilless blaze
Fill'd angels with amaze,
When at that voice sprang forth the rolling suns on high.

And thou wert laid within the narrow tomb,
Thy clay-cold limbs with shrouding grave-clothes bound;
The sealed stone confirm'd thy mortal doom,
Lone watchmen walk'd thy desert burial ground,
Whom heaven could not contain,
Nor th' immeasurable plain
Of vast Infinity inclose or circle round.

For us, for us, thou didst endure the pain,
And thy meek spirit bow'd itself to shame,
To wash our souls from sin's infecting stain,
T' avert the Father's wrathful vengeance flame:
Thou, that couldst nothing win
By saving worlds from sin,
Nor aught of glory add to thy all-glorious name.

The Prefect's Hall of Justice.

OLYBIUS, VOPISCUS, MACER, PRIEST, *Romans, &c.*
CALLIAS.

DIODOTUS, CHARINUS, CALANTHIAS, *and other Christians.*

PRIEST.

The sacrifice hath pleased the immortal Gods.
With willing foot the golden-horned steer
Moved to the altar, and in proud delight
Shook the white fillet on his brow: the blood
Pour'd forth its purple stream profuse; the Aruspex
Gazed on the perfect entrails; and the smoke
Rose in a full unbroken cloud. Great Prefect,
Thy deed is holy to our Gods.

OLYBIUS.

The Gods,
Whose honour we espouse, espouse our cause.

Hear me, ye Priests on earth, ye Gods in heaven!
By Vesta, and her virgin-guarded fires;
By Mars, the Sire and guardian God of Rome;
By Antioch's bright Apollo; by the throne
Of him whose thunder shakes the vaulted skies;
And that dread oath I add, that binds th' immortals,
The unblessed waters of Tartarian Styx:
Last, by the avengers of despised vows,
Th' inevitable serpent-hair'd Eumenides,
Olybius swears, thus mounting on the throne
Of justice, to exhaust heaven's wrath on all
That have cast off their fathers' Gods for rites
New and unholy. From my heart I blot
Partial affection and the love of kindred;
Even if my father's blood flow'd in their veins,
I would obey the Emperor, and the Gods!

VOPISCUS.

So nobly said, as nobly be it done.

OLYBIUS.

Lead forth the prisoners!

Ye of nobler birth,
Diodotus, Charinus, and Calanthias,
And ye, the baser and misguided multitude,
Ye stand denounced before our solemn throne
As guilty of that Galilean faith,
Whose impious and blaspheming scorn disdains
Our fathers' Gods; ye serve not in our temples;
Crown not our altars; kneel not at our shrines;
And in their stead, in loose and midnight feasts
Ye meet, obscuring with a deeper gloom
Of shame and horror night's chaste brow.

DIODOTUS.

Olybius!
Were these foul deeds as true as they are false,
We might return, that we but imitate
The Gods ye worship—ye, who deify
Adultery, and throne incest in the skies:
Who, not content with earth's vast scope defiled,
Advance the majesty of human sin
Even till it fills the empyreal heavens. Ye sit

Avengers of impure, unhallow'd licence.
'Tis well:—why summon then your Gods to answer,
Wrest the idle thunderbolt from amorous Jove,
Dispeople all Olympus,—ay, draw down
The bright-hair'd Sun from his celestial height,
To give accompt of that most fond pursuit
Through yon dim grove of cypress.

OLYBIUS.

Do we wonder
That Heaven rains plagues upon the guilty earth;
That Pestilence is let loose, and Famine stalks
O'er kingdoms, withering them to barrenness;
That reeling cities shake, and the swoln seas
Engulph our navies, or with sudden inroad
Level our strong-wall'd ports! But, impious men,
We will no longer share your doom; nor suffer
Th' indiscriminate vengeance from on high
To wrap mankind in wide promiscuous ruin:
Impatient earth shall shake you from her bosom,
Even as a city spurns the plague-struck man

From her barr'd gates, lest her attainted airs
Be loaded with his breath.

DIODOTUS.

Hath earth but now
Begun to heave with fierce intestine fires,
Or the hot South from his unwholesome wings
Drop pestilence? Have changeless slumbers lock'd
Th' untempested and stagnant seas, and now
Awake they first to whelm your fleets and shores?
But be it so, that angry nature rages
More frequent in her fierce distemperature.
Upon yourselves, ye unbelieving Heathen,
The crime recoils. The Lord of Hosts hath walked
This world of man; the One Almighty sent
His everlasting Son to wear the flesh,
And glorify this mortal human shape.
And the blind eyes unclosed to see the Lord;
And the dumb tongues brake out in songs of praise;
And the deep grave cast forth its wondering dead;
And shuddering devils murmur'd sullen homage:

Yet him, the meek, the merciful, the just,
Upon the Cross his rebel people hung,
And mock'd his dying anguish. Since that hour,
Like flames of fire his messengers have pass'd
O'er the wide world, proclaiming him that died
Risen from the grave, and in omnipotence
Array'd on high; and as your lictors wait
Upon your earthly pomp, portentous signs
And miracles have strew'd the way before them.
But still the princes of the earth take counsel
Against the Eternal. Still the Heathen rage
In drunken fury. Therefore hath the earth
Espoused its Maker's cause; the heavens are full
Of red denouncing fires; the elements
Take up the eternal quarrel, and arise
To battle on God's side. The universe,
With one wide voice of indignation, heard
In every plague and desolating storm,
Proclaims her deep abhorrence at your sins.

OLYBIUS.

Diodotus, thou once didst share our love;
I knew thee as a soldier, valiant; wise,
I thought thee; therefore once again I stoop
To parley with thy madness. Noble warrior,
Wouldst thou that Rome, whose Gods have raised her up
To empire, boundless as the ocean-girt
And sun-enlighten'd earth; that by the side
Of her victorious chariot still have toil'd,
While there were hosts t' enslave, or realms to conquer;
That have attended on her ranging eagles
Till the winds fail'd them in their trackless flight;—
Wouldst thou, that now upon her power's meridian,
Ungrateful she should spurn the exhausted aid
Of her old guardian Deities, and disclaim
Her ancient worship? Did not willing Jove
His delegated sceptre o'er the world
Grant to our fathers? Did not arm'd Gradivus
His Thracian coursers urge before our van,
Strawing our foes, as the wild hurricane

The summer corn? Where shone the arms of Rome
That our great sire Quirinus look'd not down
Propitious from his high Olympian seat?
And shall we now forsake their hallow'd fanes,
Rich with our fathers' piety; refuse
The solemn hecatomb; dismiss the flamen
From his proud office; rend the purple robe
Pontifical, and leave each sumptuous shrine
A nestling place for foul unhallow'd birds?

DIODOTUS.

Olybius, thou wrong'st our Roman glory.
No fabled Thunderer, nor the fiery car
Of Mavors, nor long-buried Romulus,
Set up great Rome to awe the subject world:
It was her children's valour, that dared all things,
And what it dared, accomplish'd. Rome herself,
Th' Almighty willing her imperial sway,
Was her own fortune, fate, and guardian deity.
She built the all-shadowing fabric of her empire
On the strong pillars of her public virtues,

And reign'd because she was most fit to reign.
But ours, Olybius, is no earthly kingdom,
We offer not a sceptre, that proclaims
Man mightier than his brethren of the dust;
No crown that with the lofty head that wears it
Must make its mouldering pillow in the grave.
This earth disowns our glories: but when Rome
Hath sepulchred the last of all her sons,
When Desolation walks her voiceless streets,
Ay, when this world, and all its lords and slaves,
Are swept into the ghastly gulph of ruin;
High in immortal grandeur, like the stars,
But brighter and more lasting, shall our souls
Sit in their empyrean thrones, endiadem'd
With amaranthine light. Such gifts our God
Hath promised to his faithful.

OLYBIUS.

Bounteous God!
That, as an earnest of your glory, leaves you
For every spurning foot to trample on,

To feed unstruggling the fierce beast of rapine,
To stand with open and untented wounds
Beneath the scorching sun! Where sleep the bolts
Of your Almighty, when we hale you forth
To glut the fire, or make a spectacle
Of your dread sufferings to the applauding people?

DIODOTUS.

Our God and Saviour gives us what we pray for;
On earth a portion of his bitter cup
To purify the world from our gross souls,
And disencumber us for heaven.

CHARINUS.

Diodotus!
Why stand'st thou thus, and dalliest with this man?
Hear me, I say, proud Pilate! on thy throne
Of judgment we defy thee,—loose thy hell-hounds!

OLYBIUS.

I'll bear no more—Away with them!—we'll glut
Their mad desires with suffering!
Ha, what's here?

The above. Shepherd, Guards, &c. with a veiled Maiden.

OLYBIUS.

Why drag ye forth that maid, who by her fillet
And flowing robes should seem a virgin, chosen
For Phœbus' service?

SHEPHERD.

Hear us, great Olybius.
There is a cave beside Orontes' stream
Roof'd with the dropping crystal, and the ivy
And woodbine trail their tendrils o'er its porch
As to conceal its secret chamber. There,
'Tis said, the Naiads, after cool disport
In the fresh waters, carelessly recline
Their dripping limbs upon the fragrant moss;
And when the light winds lift the verdant veil,
Some have beheld the unearthly loveliness
That slept within; and some have heard at noon
Bewitching sounds, that made the sultry air
Delicious. We, with venturous foot profane,

At that nymph-hallow'd hour had wander'd thither,
When, horror struck, we heard two murmuring voices;
One of a man, and of a maiden one,
Pouring upon the still and shudd'ring air
Their hymn to Christ—we seized and bore them hither.

OLYBIUS.

Ha! rend they then the dedicated maids
Even from our altars?—Haste, withdraw the veil
In which her guilty face is shrouded close—
—Their magic mocks my sight—I seem to see
What cannot be before me—Margarita!
Answer, if thou art she.

CALLIAS.

Great Judge! great Prefect!
It is my child—Apollo's gifted priestess!
Within that holy and oracular cave
Her spirit quaffs th' absorbing inspiration.
Lo, with what cold and wandering gaze she looks
On me, her sire—it chokes her voice—these men,
These wicked, false, blaspheming men, have leagued
To swear away her life.

OLYBIUS.

Callias, stand back.

Speak, virgin: wherefore wert thou there? with whom?

CALLIAS.

Seal, Phœbus, seal her lips in mercy.

OLYBIUS.

Peace!

MARGARITA.

I went to meet the minister of Christ,

And pray——

OLYBIUS.

Now where is he? by all the Gods

I'll rend asunder his white youthful limbs;

I'll set his head, with all its golden locks,

Upon the city gate, for each that passes

To shed his loathsome contumely upon it—

I'll——Now by heaven, she smiles!—Apostate!——still

I cannot hate her. (*Apart*).

Priestess of Apollo,

Advance, and lend thy private ear. Fond maid,

Is't for some lov'd and favour'd youth thou'rt changed?
Renounce thy frantic faith, and live for him;
For him, and not for me.

MARGARITA.

Oh, generous Prefect!
I do beseech thee, for thy soul's sake, shed not
The innocent blood; for him that I have loved—
Behold him here.

Guards, with FABIUS.

GUARD.

The second criminal!

FABIUS.

Thou'rt here before me, daughter:—may thy path
To heaven precede me thus.

MARGARITA.

Amen! Amen!

OLYBIUS.

He!—he! that man with thin and hoary hair,
Bow'd down, and feebly borne on tottering limbs!
Ye Gods—ye Gods, I thank you!

CALLIAS.

Wizard! Sorcerer!
What hast thou done to witch my child from me?
What potent herbs dug at the full of the moon,
What foul Thessalian charms dost bear about thee?
Hast thou made league with Hecate, or wrung
From the unwilling dead the accursed secret
That gives thee power o'er human souls?

FABIUS.

Thou 'st err'd
Into a truth: the dead hath risen, and walk'd
The unconscious earth; and what he taught, I teach.

CALLIAS.

Away with him!—he doth confess—away!

OLYBIUS.

Off with him to the torturers!

FABIUS.

Hear me, Prefect;
Hear me, I charge thee by the eternal God,
Him whom thou know'st not, yet whose name o'erawes
thee;

Nor think ye that I speak to sue for mercy
Upon these children or myself: expend
Your subtlest tortures, nought can ye inflict
But what we are proud to suffer. For yourselves
I speak, in mercy to your forfeit souls.
God—at whose word the vast creation sprang,
Exulting in its light and harmony,
From the blank silence of the void abyss;
At whose command at once the unpeopled world
Brake out in life, and man, the lord of all,
Walk'd that pure Paradise, from which his sin
Expell'd him—God, that to the elder world
Spake with the avenging voice of rolling waters,
When the wide deluge swept from all the earth
The giant-born—He that in thunder-peals
Held dreadful converse with his chosen people;
And made the portent-teeming elements,
And the rapt souls of Prophets, to proclaim
His will almighty—in our latter days
That God hath spoken by his Son. He came,

From the dark ages of the infant world
Foretold,—the Prophets' everlasting Burthen.
The Virgin bare the Son, the angelic hosts
Burst out in song—the Father from his clouds
Declared him. To his miracles of might
Consenting, Nature own'd her Lord. His power,
His sorrows, all his glory, all his shame,
His cross, his death, his broken tomb bare witness,
And the bright clouds that wrapt him to the Sire
Ascending. And again he comes, again;
But not as then, not clad in mortal flesh,
To live the life, or die the death of man:
Girt with his own omnipotence, his throne
The wreck of worlds; the glory of his presence
Lighting infinity: He comes to assume
Th' eternal Judgment Seat. Then thou and I,
Olybius, and thy armed satellites,
And these my meek and lowly followers;
Thou, that art there enthroned in purple robes,
The thrice-triumphant Lord of all our Asia,

And I, a nameless, weak, unknown old man,
That stand an helpless criminal before thee,
Shall meet once more. The earth shall cast us up,
The winds shall waft our thin and scatter'd ashes,
The ocean yield us up our drowned bones;
There shall we meet before the cloudy throne—
Before the face of him, whose awful brightness
Shall be the sun of that dread day, in which
The thousand thousands of the angelic hosts,
And all the souls of all mankind shall bask,
Waiting their doom eternal. Thou and I
Shall there give in the accompt of this day's process,
And Christ shall render each his due reward.
Now, sir, your sentence.

MARGARITA.

Merciful Jesus! melt
His spirit in its hardness.

MACER.

By our Gods,
The very soldiers lean their pallid cheeks

Upon their spears; and at his every pause
The panting of their long suppressed breath
Is audible.

VOPISCUS.

Methinks the stern Olybius
Is lost in mute admiring meditation.

OLYBIUS.

There needed not your taunt, sir, to awake
Olybius to his duty.

CHARINUS.

They demur,
And will defraud us of our glorious crowns.
Must we not scoff them back into their rage?
What, Heathens, shake ye at an old man's voice?
What will ye when the archangel trumpet thrills
Upon your souls?

FABIUS.

Charinus, if thou lov'st
Thy soul, be silent—pride must fall: the boastful
Denied his Lord, and thou——

CHARINUS.

I?——

OLYBIUS.

Drag them forth,
Some to the dungeons, to the torturers some,
As we give order;—and to-morrow morn,
Whoe'er adores not at Apollo's shrine
In Daphne, him the headsman's gleaming steel,
Or the fierce lions, or the flaming pile,
Shall cut away, as a corrupted branch
From flourishing Antioch.—Off with them, I say!

CHRISTIANS.

Hallelujah! Lord our God!
Now our earthly path is trod;
Pass'd are now our cares and fears,
And we quit this vale of tears.

Hallelujah! King of Kings!
Now our spirits spread their wings,
To the mansions of the blest,
To thy everlasting rest.

Hallelujah! Lord of Lords!
Be our last and dying words,
Glory to our God above,
To our murderers, peace and love.

The Prison.

MARGARITA.

I'm safe at last: the wild and furious cries
That drove me on are dying into silence.
These cold and damp and gloomy prison walls
Are my protection. And few hours ago
My presence would have made an holiday
In Antioch. As I've moved along the streets,
I've heard the mother chide her sportive child
For breaking the admiring stillness round me.
There was no work so precious or so dear
But they deserted it to gaze on me.

And now they bay'd at me, like angry dogs:
And every brow was wrinkled, every hand
Clench'd in fierce menace: from their robes they shook
The dust upon me, even more loathsome scorn
Was cast upon my path. And can it be,
Oh Christ! that I, whose tainted hands so late
Served at the idol's altar; on whose lips
And lyre still ring the idol's votive hymns,
Am chosen to bear thy cross, and wear on high
The martyr's robes enwoven of golden light?

CALLIAS, MARGARITA.

MARGARITA.

Alas! my father!

CALLIAS.

Oh my child! my child!
Once more I find thee. Even the savage men,
That stand with rods and axes round the gate,
Had reverence for gray hairs: they let me pass,

And with rude pity bless'd me—Thou alone
Art cold and tearless in your father's sorrows.

MARGARITA.

Oh say not so!

CALLIAS.

And wilt thou touch me, then,
Polluted, as thy jealous sect proclaims,
By idols? Oh, ye unrelenting Gods!
More unrelenting daughter, not content
To make me wretched by depriving me
Of my soul's treasure, do ye envy me
The miserable solace of her tears
Mingling with mine? She quits the world, and me,
Rejoicing——

MARGARITA.

No!

CALLIAS.

And I, whose blameless pride
Dwelt on her—even as all the lands, no more.

The sculptor wrought his Goddess by her form,
Her likeness was the stamp of its divinity.
And when I walk'd in Antioch, all men hail'd
The father of the beauteous Margarita,
And now they 'll fret me with their cold compassion
Upon the childless, desolate——

MARGARITA.

My father,
I could have better borne thy wrath, thy curse.

CALLIAS.

Alas! I am too wretched to feel wrath:
There is no violence in a broken spirit.
Well, I've not long to live: it matters not
Whether the old man go henceforth alone.
And if his limbs should fail him, he may seize
On some cold pillar, or some lintel post,
For that support which human hands refuse him;
Or he must hire some slave, with face and voice
Dissonant and strange; or——

MARGARITA.

Gracious Lord, have mercy!

For what to this to-morrow's scourge or stake?

CALLIAS.

And he must sit the livelong day alone
In silence, in the Temple Porch. No lyre,
Or one by harsh and jarring fingers touch'd,
For that which all around distill'd a calm
More sweet than slumber. Unfamiliar hands
Must strew his pillow, and his weary eyes
By unfamiliar hands be closed at length
For their long sleep.

MARGARITA.

Alas! alas! my father,
Why do they rend me from thee, for what crime?
I am a Christian: will a Christian's hands
With tardier zeal perform a daughter's duty?
A Christian's heart with colder fondness tend
An aged father? What forbids me still

To lead thy feeble steps, where the warm sun
Quickens thy chill and languid blood; or where
Some shadow soothes the noontide's burning heat;
To watch thy wants, to steal about thy chamber
With foot so light, as to invite the sleep
To shed its balm upon thy lids? Dear sir,
Our faith commands us even to love our foes—
Can it forbid to love a father?

CALLIAS.

Prove it,
And for thy father's love forswear this faith.

MARGARITA.

Forswear it?

CALLIAS.

Or dissemble; any thing
But die and leave me.

MARGARITA.

Who disown their Lord
On earth, will he disown in heaven.

CALLIAS.

Hard heart!

Credulous of all but thy fond father's sorrows,
Thou wilt believe each wild and monstrous tale
Of this fond faith.

MARGARITA.

I dare not disbelieve
What the dark grave hath cast the buried forth
To utter: to whose visible form on earth
After the cross expiring men have written
Their witness in their blood.

CALLIAS.

Whence learnt thou this?
Tell me, my child; for sorrow's weariness
Is now so heavy on me, I can listen
Nor rave. Come, sit we down on this coarse straw,
Thy only couch—thine, that wert wont to lie
On the soft plumage of the swan, that shamed not
Thy spotless limbs—Come.

MARGARITA.

Dost thou not remember
When Decius was the Emperor, how he came
To Antioch, and when holy Babylas
Withstood his entrance to the Christian church,
Frantic with wrath, he bade them drag him forth
To cruel death? Serene the old man walk'd
The crowded streets; at every pause the yell
Of the mad people made, his voice was heard
Blessing God's bounty, or imploring pardon
Upon the barbarous hosts that smote him on.
Then didst thou hold me up, a laughing child,
To gaze on that sad spectacle. He pass'd,
And look'd on me with such a gentle sorrow;
The pallid patience of his brow toward me
Seem'd softening to a smile of deepest love.
When all around me mock'd, and howl'd, and laugh'd,
God gave me grace to weep. In after time
That face would on my noontide dreams return;
And in the silence of the night I heard

The murmur of that voice remote, and touch'd
To an aerial sweetness, like soft music
Over a tract of waters. My young soul
Lay wrapt in wonder, how that meek old man
Could suffer with such unrepining calmness,
Till late I learnt the faith for which he suffer'd,
And wonder'd then no more. Thou'rt weeping, too—
Oh Jesus, hast thou moved his heart?

CALLIAS.

Away!

Insatiate of thy father's misery,
Wouldst have the torturers wring the few chill drops
Of blood that linger in these wither'd veins?

MARGARITA.

I'd have thee with me in the changeless heavens,
Where we should part no more; reclined together
Far from the violence of this wretched world;
Emparadised in bliss, to which the Elysium
Dream'd by fond poets were a barren waste.

CALLIAS.

Would we were there, or any where but here,
Where the cold damps are oozing from the walls,
And the thick darkness presses like a weight
Upon the eyelids. Daughter, when thou served'st
Thy fathers' Gods, thou wert not thus: the sun
Was brightest where thou wert—beneath thy feet
Flowers grew. Thou sat'st like some unclouded star,
Insphered in thine own light and joy, and mad'st
The world around thee beauteous; now, cold earth
Must be thy couch to-night, to-morrow morn——
——What means that music?—Oh, I used to love
Those evening harpings once, my child!

MARGARITA.

I hear
The maids; beneath the twilight they are thronging
To Daphne, and they carol as they pass.

CALLIAS.

Thou canst not go.

MARGARITA.

Lament not that, my father.

CALLIAS.

Thou must breathe here the damp and stifling air.

MARGARITA.

Nay, listen not.

CALLIAS.

They call us hence.—Ah me,
My gentle child, in vain wouldst thou distract
My rapt attention from each well-known note,
Once hallow'd to mine ear by thine own voice,
Which erst made Antioch vacant, drawing after thee
The thronging youth, which cluster'd all around thee
Like bees around their queen, the happiest they
That were the nearest. Oh, my child! my child!
Thou canst not yet be blotted from their memory.
And I'll go forth, and kneel at every foot,
To the stern Prefect show my hoary hair,
And sue for mercy on myself, not thee.

MARGARITA.

Go not, my father.

CALLIAS.

Cling not round me thus;
There, there, even there repose upon the straw.
Nay, let me go, or I'll——but I've no power,
Thou heed'st not now my anger or my love;
So, so farewell, then, and our Gods or thine,
Or all that have the power to bless, be with thee!

[*Departs.*

EVENING SONGS OF THE MAIDENS

(*Heard at a distance*).

I.

Come away, with willing feet
Quit the close and breathless street:
Sultry court and chamber leave,
Come and taste the balmy eve,
Where the grass is cool and green,
And the verdant laurels screen

All whose timid footsteps move
With the quickening stealth of love;
Where Orontes' waters hold
Mirrors to your locks of gold,
And the sacred Daphne weaves
Canopies of trembling leaves.

II.

Come away, the heavens above
Just have light enough for love;
And the crystal Hesperus
Lights his dew-fed lamp for us.
Come, the wider shades are falling,
And the amorous birds are calling
Each his wandering mate to rest
In the close and downy nest.
And the snowy orange flowers,
And the creeping jasmine bowers,
From their swinging censers cast
Their richest odours, and their last.

III.

Come, the busy day is o'er,
Flying spindle gleams no more;
Wait not till the twilight gloom
Darken o'er th' embroider'd loom.
Leave the toilsome task undone,
Leave the golden web unspun.
Hark, along the humming air
Home the laden bees repair;
And the bright and dashing rill
From the side of every hill,
With a clearer, deeper sound,
Cools the freshening air around.

IV.

Come, for though our God the Sun
Now his fiery course hath run;
There the western waves among
Lingers not his glory long;

There the couch awaits him still,
Wrought by Jove-born Vulcan's skill
Of the thrice-refined gold,
With its wings that wide unfold,
O'er the surface of the deep
To waft the bright-hair'd God asleep
From the Hesperian islands blest,
From the rich and purple West,
To where the swarthy Indians lave
In the farthest Eastern wave.

V.

There the Morn on tiptoe stands,
Holding in her rosy hands
All the amber-studded reins
Of the steeds with fiery manes,
For the sky-borne charioteer
To start upon his new career.
Come, for when his glories break
Every sleeping maid must wake.

Brief be then our stolen hour
In the fragrant Daphne's bower;
Brief our twilight dance must be
Underneath the cypress tree.
Come away, and make no stay,
Youth and maiden, come away.

Night.

A splendid, illuminated Palace.

MARGARITA.

Am I brought here to die? My prison open'd
Softly as to an angel's touch, and hither
Was I led forth among the breathing lutes
Of our blithe maidens, as to lure me on.
And still where'er I move, as from the earth,
Or floating in the calm embosoming air,
Sweet sounds of music seem to follow me.
I breathe as 'twere an atmosphere distill'd
From richest flowers; and, lest the unwonted light
Offend mine eyes, so late released from gloom,
'Tis soothed and cool'd in alabaster lamps.
And is it thus ye would enamour me
Of this sad world? Your luxuries, your pomps,
Your vaulted ceilings, that with fond delay
Prolong the harp's expiring sweetness; walls,

Where the bright paintings breathe and speak, and chambers
Where all would soothe to sleep, but that to sleep
Were to suspend the sense of their soft pleasures;
They are wasted all on me: as though I trod
The parching desert, still my spirit longs
To spread its weary wings, and be at rest.
Oh, vainly thus would ye enhance my loss,
By gilding thus the transient life I lose!
Were mine affections dead to all things earthly
As to these idle flatteries of the sense,
My trial were but light.
There's some one comes—
Is it the ruthless executioner?

Olybius, Margarita.

OLYBIUS.

Fairest, it is——

MARGARITA.

Lord Prefect, it becomes
The dying Christian to be mock'd in death;

But it becomes not great Olybius
To play the mocker.

OLYBIUS.

Mock thee! I had rather
Fall down and worship at thy feet.

MARGARITA.

My Lord,
I said before thou dost not well to heap
Cold insult on the head thou tramplest on.
If that mine hour is come, command thy slaves
To lead me forth.

OLYBIUS.

I will—but they shall wear
The bridal saffron; all their locks shall bloom
With garlands; and their blazing nuptial torches,
And hymeneal songs, prepare the way
Before Love's blushing martyr.

MARGARITA.

Sir, go on;
I can endure even this.

OLYBIUS.

Sweet Margarita,
Give me thine hand—for once—Oh! snowy treasure,
That shall be mine thus fondly clasp'd for ever.
Now, Margarita, cast thine eyes below—
What seest thou?

MARGARITA.

Here Apollo's temple rests
Its weight upon its snow-white columns. There
The massy shades of Daphne, with its streams,
That with their babbling sounds allure the sight,
Where their long dim-seen tracts of silvery whiteness
Now gleam, and now are lost again. Beyond,
The star-lit city in its wide repose;
Each tall and silent tower in stately darkness
Distinct against the cloudless sky.

OLYBIUS.

Beneath thee,
Now, to the left?

MARGARITA.

A dim and narrow court
I see, where shadows as of hurrying men
Pass and repass; and now and then their lights
Wander on shapeless heaps, like funeral piles.
And there are things of strange distorted shape,
On which the torches cast a colder hue,
As though on iron instruments of torture
A little farther, there are moving lamps
In the black amphitheatre, that glance,
And as they glance, each narrow aperture
Is feebly gilded with their slanted light.
It is the quick and busy preparation
For the dark sacrifice of to-morrow.

OLYBIUS.

There,
If thou canst add the scorn, and shame, and pain,
The infuriate joy of the fierce multitude,
The flowing blood, and limbs that writhe in flame,
Thou seest what thou preparest for thyself.

Now what Olybius' love prepares for thee,
Fairest, behold!—This high irradiate roof
Fretted with lamps; these gorgeous chambers, each
As it recedes of costlier splendour, strew'd
With all the barbarous Indian's loom hath wrought,
Or all the enslaved ocean wafts to Tyre.
Arabia's weeping groves are odourless,
Her balmy wealth exhausted o'er our couches
Of banquet, where the revelling Syria spreads
Her fruits and wines in vases cool with snow
From Libanus. Around are summer gardens
Of sunny lawn and sweet secluded shade,
Which waft into the gilded casement airs
Loaded with dewy fragrance, and send up
The coolness of their silver-dashing fountains,
As Nature's self strove in fond rivalry
With Art to pamper every sense. Behold
Yon throne, whereon the Asiarch holds his state,
Circled with kings and more than kingly Romans;
There by his side shall Margarita sit,

Olybius' bride; with all the adoring city,
And every province of the sumptuous East,
Casting its lavish homage at her feet;
Her life one luxury of love, her state
One scene of peerless pomp and pride; her will
The law of spacious kingdoms, and her lord
More glorious for the beauty of his bride
Than for three triumphs. Now, my soul's beloved!
Make thou thy choice.

MARGARITA.

'Tis made—the funeral pyre.

OLYBIUS.

Dearest, what say'st thou? Wouldst thou have me woo thee
So that the burning blushes should——

MARGARITA.

Oh! hear me,
Olybius—Should we look to-morrow eve
On that sad court of death, the winds that bore
The groans of anguish will have died in silence;
The untainted earth have drank the blood, nor trace

Remain of all those Christian multitudes,
Save some small urns of dust. A few years pass'd,
Could we look round where stands this spacious palace,
Yon throne of gold, these high and arching roofs,
Even on thine own majestic shape, Olybius,
Will the distinguish'd dust of these proud chambers,
Or even thine own embalmed ashes, wear
The stamp and impress of their kingly lord?
With the same scorn will the coarse peasant's foot
Tread all beneath it. But the soul—the soul,
What then will be its separate doom? What seats
Of light and bliss will hold to-morrow's victims!
On what dark beds shall those recline, who have shone
A little longer in this cloudy sphere,
And bask'd within the blaze of human glory,
Ere yet the eternal night hath gather'd them
In darkness!—Oh! were this world all, Olybius,
With joy would I become thy cupbearer,
And minister the richest wine of life,
Long as thy mortal lips could quaff of bliss.

But now a nobler service doth become me;
I'll use thy fabling poet's phrase, and be
Thy Hebe, with officious hand to reach thee
The ambrosial cup of everlasting gladness.

OLYBIUS.

How doth the rapture of her speech enkindle
The brightness of her beauty! never yet
Look'd she so lovely, when her loosen'd locks
Flow'd in the frantic grace of inspiration
From the burst fillet down her snowy neck.

MARGARITA.

Roman, I know thy spirit pants for glory;
There is a thirst within thine inmost soul,
Which triumphs cannot satiate, nor the sway
Of earth. I'll tell thee how to win a record
That shall be register'd by flaming hands
In the adamantine heavens.

OLYBIUS.

But canst thou win me
An immortality of thee?

MARGARITA.

I can.

OLYBIUS.

Name then the price, and be it the forfeit life
Of the most hardy in yon Christian crew,
'Tis given.

MARGARITA.

I ask thine own eternal soul—
Believe in Jesus Christ, and I am thine.
——Thou smil'st on me as with a scornful pity;
I may not scorn, but from my inmost soul
I pity thee. These tears, these bursting tears,
Flow but for thee, Olybius! Little know'st thou
What sacrifice it were t' abandon now
The saintly quiet of the unwedded state;
Where all the undistracted spirit dwells
On heaven alone; nor love, nor hope, nor duty,
Nor daily thought, nor nightly dream withdrawn
From him, who is the sun to that pale flower
The virgin's heart. Those silent stars above us

Are not so pure, so calm, so far removed
From earth, as maidens dedicate to Christ;
And I would quit that cloudless course on high
To wander in the darkling world with thee.

OLYBIUS.

There was a time, I will not say thy lips,
But thy full sparkling eye spake softer language;
Then——

MARGARITA.

Oh! reproach me not my days of shame.
I will not say I loved thee not, Olybius,
With a most fond and earthly love. In truth,
Or ere I learnt this unimpassion'd faith,
Thou wert my soul's idolatry—thy form
Usurp'd Apollo's pedestal, diverting
All to thyself, mine incense and my vows.
Thou wert mine all on earth, nor knew I ought
Beyond to rival thee. Olybius, gaze not
In wonder thus; learn thou this faith, and then
Thy bride will bring to thee a nobler dowry

Than her poor beauty. Thou wouldst bless me, then,
Nor chide me as an alien to thy love.
Or should a darker destiny await us,
If, ere the twilight hour that gave me to thee,
We were led forth to die; if funeral fires
Were all our bridal lights, our bridal couch
The rack, and scorn our hymeneal song,
Thou wouldst turn to me in thine agony,
In full and unrepining fondness turn,
And bless me still, while thou hadst breath for blessing!
Nay, turn not from me.

OLYBIUS.

Curse upon this faith,
That thus hath wrung the love from thy pure soul!
Curse on thy——

MARGARITA.

Ha! thou shalt not curse the Saviour.
Alas! and there's no hope—he's lost—he's lost—
So now farewell for ever, proud Olybius!
Henceforth our way along this world of woe

Must be far separate to our separate graves,
And separate too our everlasting dwellings—
Though my voice fail, I'll weep a last farewell!

OLYBIUS.

Now whither goest thou?

MARGARITA.

To my prison, sir.

OLYBIUS.

Ay, and thou shalt. But hast thou thought, fond maid,
To what my wrath may doom thee? Will those limbs,
Wont once to tremble at the zephyr's breath,
That lightly disarranged thy bashful robes—
Thou, that didst blush, like morning, when the eyes
Of men beheld thy half-veil'd face—wilt thou
Endure thy unrobed loveliness to be
The public gaze?

MARGARITA.

Will great Olybius take
Such poor revenge?

OLYBIUS.

By heaven! but I must leave her,
Or she will tempt me to unmanly violence,
Or melt within me all my Roman virtue.
By all the Gods! I'll find a way to tame
This wayward fawn.—So, since thou wilt, proud woman,
Return to solitude and gloom, to-morrow
Thou wakest to the bridal or to death!

MARGARITA.

He's gone—how suddenly!—and still I hoped,
And surely 'twas no sin to hope so fondly,
That He, who made the proud rebellious waves
Of the vex'd sea in smooth obedient calmness
Sink down, might yet rebuke his haughty spirit.

Callias, Margarita.

CALLIAS.

Queen of the East! thy father doth thee homage.
The Egyptian that quaff'd off the liquid pearl,
That changed her beauty's slaves but as the world

Its lords, shall pass into the oblivious Lethe,
And my bright daughter be henceforth the proverb
Of loveliness——

MARGARITA.

What mean'st thou?

CALLIAS.

And Orontes
Shall put to shame pale Cydnus, when thou sailest
In gilded galley down the obsequious tide,
The air all music, and the heavens all brightness;
And all the shores alive with Antioch's sons,
Yea, those of utmost Asia, that shall bear
The thought of thee, like precious merchandize,
Back to their homes, henceforward held in honour
For having gazed on queenly Margarita.

MARGARITA.

Ah! how to check this frantic rapture?

CALLIAS.

She,
The haughty mistress of the Palmy City,

Whom great Aurelian and the arms of Rome
Scarce bow'd, no more shall fill Fame's brazen trump,
That shall devote alone to Margarita
The fulness of its sound.

MARGARITA.

Why so, sir?

CALLIAS.

Why?

Doth not Olybius, great Olybius,
The Emperor's second self, the Lord of Asia,
Whose triumphs gild our late degenerate days
With splendour worthy elder Rome; whose form
Were fittest by imperial Juno's side
To walk the clouds, her chosen mate; to lacquey
Whose royal state barbaric monarchs vie—
Hath he not deign'd to call thee bride?

MARGARITA.

My father,
Thou know'st the way I'm going, and canst lead me.

CALLIAS.

Whither, my child? Are not these chambers thine,
That with their splendour load my unwonted eyes?
Is not the banquet and the couch of rest
Prepared?

MARGARITA.

It is:—the prisoner's bitter bread,
And earth-strewn couch.

CALLIAS.

Hath he deceived me, then?

MARGARITA.

No; thou'st deceived thyself.

CALLIAS.

What! and to-morrow
No bridal pomp, no hymenean song?

MARGARITA.

Oh yes, my father, I shall wed to-morrow,
But with no earthly bridegroom; songs there will be,
But of this sinful world unheard.

CALLIAS.

Thou mean'st not

That thou shalt die?

MARGARITA.

I shall begin to live

To-morrow—Father, I would have thee with me,

That I may say, Adieu——

CALLIAS.

Liars and murderers!

Did they not tell me, with a flattering smoothness

Of voice, like spaniels fawning at my feet,

That they were leading thee to be their queen,

Olybius' bride? And will they cast thee back

Into the loathsome dungeon, to come forth

And bow this neck, this soft and ivory neck,

To the fierce headsman?

MARGARITA.

It was truth they spake.

CALLIAS.

Well, then!—Ah, now 'tis clear—'tis age hath crazed me,

And made this dim confusion in my brain,
And hence such strange things seem to be, and are not.
Come, I'll go with thee where thou wilt; I know
Old doting age should be obedient. Thou
Wilt tell me what this hurrying alternation
Of light and gloom, and palaces and prisons,
Of nuptials and of murders, means:—in truth,
I do begin to hope it is a dream.
Life's dying flame, they say, like waning lamps,
Casts oft unreal shadows, that perplex
The parting soul—But this is certain; yet
I have not lost thee, for I feel thine hand
Trembling and warm in my cold palm. Go on,
But hold me thus, I'll follow thee for ever.

Another Chamber.

OLYBIUS.

Put out those dazzling lights, nor weary me
With that incessant music.
Cruel Fates!
Have ye thus pamper'd my insatiate soul,
Preventing all my wishes by fulfilment;
And led me step by step unto the Capitol
Of man's felicity, to laugh me there
To scorn, by setting up a golden crown
Of all my toils, that withers in my grasp?
Th' inured to misery are inured to suffering;
But he on whom Success hath ever waited,
The thunder-bearing eagle of his war,
In peace his busy minister of pleasure,
To him the thought of one thing unpossess'd
Casts back a gloomy shadow, that o'erclouds
All his pass'd tract of glory and of bliss.

Oh! that the barren earth had born to me
But shame and sorrow's bitter fruits.
But I,
That boasted in my single soul to centre
The rigid virtues of old Rome, myself
The nobler Scipio of a looser age,
Am I thus sunk? There were in elder days
Who from the bottom of their hearts have pluck'd
Rooted affection, and have proudly worn
Their lives, thus self-despoil'd of their best treasures—
Fathers have led their gallant sons to th' axe——
Oh! but to doom that neck, round which I thought
Mine arms should grow, upon the block;—that face,
Which oft my dreams presented me, composed
In loving rest upon my slumbering bosom,
Convulsed!——The heavens and earth shall fall together
Ere this shall be!—But how to save her—how—
And must Olybius stoop to means beyond
His own high will?
This pale and false Vopiscus

Hath from great Probus wrung his easy mandate:
Him Asia owns her Prefect, if Olybius
Obey not this fell edict.——I must plunge
The world in civil strife, uplift the banner
Of arm'd rebellion 'gainst mine Emperor,
The father of my fortunes—trample down
My solemn oaths sworn to th' assembled people——
What then?—howl war, and to the dust my glory.
Shall it be so?——Who comes?—Vopiscus!

OLYBIUS, VOPISCUS, MACER, *Romans.*

VOPISCUS.

See,
My friends, that empire's weight is no light burthen:
The nightly sleep may seal the vulgar eye;
The public weal denies to great Olybius
That base plebeian blessing.

OLYBIUS.

Is the night
So nearly pass'd?

VOPISCUS.

The purple dawn begins
To tip with light the misty eastern hills.

MACER.

Already doth the wakeful people throng
In gay and holiday attire; even now
I heard the clamour of the baser sort,
In merry conflict, for their foremost seats
In the Amphitheatre, and around the piles
On which the Christians are to burn.

VOPISCUS.

'Tis time,
Great Prefect, that we too prepare. Olybius
Were doubtless loth to check the people's zeal,
That shout for death on every Christian head.

OLYBIUS.

When I am bow'd beneath thy rule, mine acts
Shall render their accompt to thee.

MACER.

Olybius,

Beseech thee hear me these few words apart.
Whom thou wouldst save, I know, nor speak of it
But in officious love—But, on thy life,
I pray thee.

OLYBIUS.

On my life!

MACER.

This night I have heard
Along the streets and in the noisy taverns,
All Antioch, madden'd by the angry priests,
Even thine own soldiers, swear to glut their eyes
With the apostate maiden's blood. Shouldst thou,
All lov'd, and fear'd, and honour'd as thou art,
Outspread thy purple mantle over her,
They'll pluck her thence, and rend her limb from limb.

OLYBIUS.

What! dare the rabble menace him whose wrath
The royal Parthian fled?

MACER.

But yield thus far—

Let her be led forth with the rest; to me
Entrust the order that she suffer last.
My life upon 't she yields; the soul of woman
Fears not in thought the anguish, which, if seen,
Appals her back into her nature's softness;
They can defy the pain they cannot gaze on.

OLYBIUS.

Excellent! excellent! my noblest friend,
To thee I trust my more than life.
Lead on;
Ere one hour pass we meet before the temple.
Away!

VOPISCUS.

'Tis time.

OLYBIUS.

Thou, Macer, stay with me.
To each and all, till morn hath broken, farewell!

The Prison.

MARGARITA.

Oh Lord! thou oft hast sent thy plumed angels,
And with their silent presence they have awed
The Heathen's violence to a placid peace.
The ravening beasts have laid their fawning heads
In love upon the lap of him, whom man
Had cast them for their prey: and fires have burn'd,
Unharming, like the glory of a star,
Round the pale brows of maidens; and the chains
Have dropt, like wither'd flax, from galled limbs;
And whom the infuriate people led to death,
They have fallen down, and worshipp'd as a deity.
But thou hast sent a kindlier boon to me,
A soft prophetic peace, that soothes my soul,
Like music, to an heavenly harmony.
For in my slumber a bright being came,
And with faint steps my father follow'd him,

Up through the argent fields, and there we met
And felt the joy of tears without the pain.
What's here? the bridal vestments, and the veil
Of saffron, and the garland flowers. Olybius,
Dost think to tempt me now, when all my thoughts,
Like the soft dews of evening, are drawn up
To heaven, but not to fall and taint themselves
With earth again? My inmost soul last night
Was wrung to think of our eternal parting;
But now my voice may tremble, while I say,
"God's will be done!" yet I have strength to say it.
But thou, oh morn! the last that e'er shall dawn
Through earthly mists on my sad eyes—Oh blue,
And beautiful even here, and fragrant morn,
Mother of gentle airs and blushing hues!
That bearest, too, in thy fair hand the key
To which the harmonious gates of Paradise
Unfold;—bright opening of immortal day!
That ne'er shalt know a setting, but shalt shine
Round me for ever on the crystal floors

Where Blessed Spirits tread. My bridal morn,
In which my soul is wedded to its Lord,
I may not hail thee in a mourner's garb:
Mine earthly limbs shall wear their nuptial robes,
And my locks bloom once more with flowers that fade.
But I must haste, I hear the trumpet's voice.
Acclaiming thousands answer—yet I fear not.
Oh Lord! support me, and I shall not fear.
But hark! the maidens are abroad to hail
Their God; we answer through our prison grates.
Hark!

CHORUS OF HEATHEN MAIDENS.

Now glory to the God, who breaks,
The monarch of the realms on high;
And with his trampling chariot shakes
The azure pavement of the sky.
The steeds, for human eyes too bright,
Before the yoke of chrysolite
Pant, while he springs upon his way,
The beardless youth divine, who bathes the world in day.

CHORUS OF CHRISTIANS (*from the prison*).

Now glory to the God, whose throne,
Far from this world obscure and dim,
Holds its eternal state alone
Beyond the flight of Seraphim:
The God, whose one omnific word
Yon orb of flame obedient heard,
And from the abyss in fulness sprang,
While all the blazing heavens with shouts of triumph rang.

HEATHENS.

Now glory to the God, that still
Through the pale Signs his car hath roll'd,
Nor ought but his imperious will
E'er those rebellious steeds controll'd.
Nor ever from the birth of time
Ceased he from forth the Eastern clime,
Heaven's loftiest steep his way to make
To where his flaming wheels the Hesperian waters slake.

CHRISTIANS.

Now glory to the God, that laid
His mandate on yon king of day;
The master-call the Sun obey'd,
And forced his headlong steeds to stay,
To pour a long unbroken noon
O'er the red vale of Ajalon:
By night uncheck'd fierce Joshua's sword
A double harvest reap'd of vengeance for the Lord.

HEATHENS.

Now glory to the God, whose blaze
The scatter'd hosts of darkness fly;
The stars before his conquering rays
Yield the dominion of the sky;
Nor e'er doth ancient Night presume
Her gloomy state to re-assume;
While he the wide world rules alone,
And high o'er men and Gods drives on his fire-wheel'd throne.

CHRISTIANS.

Now glory to the Lord, whose Cross
Consenting Nature shrinking saw;
Mourning the dark world's heavier loss,
The conscious Sun in silent awe
Withdrew into the depths of gloom;
The horror of that awful doom
Quench'd for three hours the noontide light,
And wrapt the guilt-shak'n earth in deep untimely night.

HEATHENS.

Now glory to the God, that wakes
With vengeance in his fiery speed,
To wreak his wrath impatient breaks
On every guilty godless head;
Hasty he mounts his early road,
And pours his brightest beams abroad:
And looks down fierce with jocund light
To see his fane avenged, his vindicated rite.

CHRISTIANS.

Now glory to the Christ, whose love
Even now prepares our seats of rest,
And in his golden courts above
Enrolls us mid his chosen Blest;
Even now our martyr robes of light
Are weaving of heaven's purest white;
And we, before thy course is done,
Shall shine more bright than thou, oh vainly-worshipp'd
Sun!

The Front of the Temple.

On one hand the Prefect's Palace, on the other the Amphitheatre.

Many Citizens.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Didst e'er behold a spectacle so rich
And sumptuous? How yon strong Centurion
With all his band are labouring to advance
Toward the temple; like to rolling rivers
The people flood around them. Lords and slaves,
Gown'd senators, and artisans in doublets,
Mothers with infants, and old tottering men,
All reverence lost for state or rank or age,
Swell the vast uproar.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Antioch doth not hold

Such multitudes; all Syria hath pour'd in,
Choking the roads with tumult.

THIRD CITIZEN.

I beheld
The Amphitheatre, its spacious circle,
From the arena to the highest seat,
One mass of living turbulence.

FIRST CITIZEN.

No wonder;
For him who linger'd in the city all
Assail'd as they pass'd by with imprecation,
And hurl'd huge stones at his devoted head,
Deeming him guilty of this faith accursed.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

On every tree they hang like birds; the courts
Around the Prefect's palace are as throng'd
As here before the temple. But for that
Beyond, wherein the executioners
Stand with bare arms around their dreadful engines,
Men struggle for the entrance as for life;

He that hath won it looks back on his comrade
More proud than if he had storm'd an enemy's camp.

FIRST CITIZEN.

How noble is this rage! Like one wild fire
The zeal of vengeance for their fathers' Gods
Wraps all these myriads.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

Ay, those stormy clouds,
To which these gather'd hosts may best be liken'd,
Are pregnant with the thunderbolts of heaven.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Thought ye all Antioch still so sound?

FOURTH CITIZEN.

I know not;
But this I know, 'twere ill for him who wore
A face of sorrow in an hour like this;
'Twere treason 'gainst the tyrant of the day—
The assembled people.

FIRST CITIZEN.

Back! fall back! the Prefect!

FOURTH CITIZEN.

Hark, friends! as now the brazen clarions cease,
How sweetly shrill the silver trumpets pierce
The eager ear. Again that general shout
From all that vast and boundless multitude!
It peals up all the Amphitheatre,
And every court takes up and multiplies
The exulting clamour, like the thunders rolling
Amid the rugged mountains.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Would not Jove
Now almost change his high immortal state,
Where Gods before his footstool bow, to win
The homage round the great Olybius pour'd?

FOURTH CITIZEN.

'Twere worth a life to be one hour as he is.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Behold! the priests of all the temples bear
Their Gods in state to see themselves avenged:
As they sweep on, the reverent crowd falls back.

Lo, first the loose-hair'd Bacchanals dance on
In wanton Thiasus, their cymbals catch
The radiant light, that falls in glancing flakes
O'er their white robes, and freshening ivy wreaths.
Lo, now the beardless youths of Dyndymene!
Half timorous, the yoked lions drag along
The golden car, where sits the tower-crown'd Queen.
Now the Egyptian timbrels ring the praise
Of Isis; and behind Jove's flamen walks
In state supreme, like his own God.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Fall down,
Ye men of Antioch! lo, your ancient Gods!
Astarte, diadem'd with her crescent moon,
And him whom by the side of Lebanon
The maidens yearly weep, soft Thammuz.

THIRD CITIZEN.

See!
The high tiara'd Magian bears his fire.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

Oh, proud assemblage of Divinity!
Lo, all the earth's conspiring Gods in league!
The ruling powers of heaven and hell are met
T' exterminate this all-abhorred faith.

SECOND CITIZEN.

But think ye that Apollo's aged priest
Will come?

FIRST CITIZEN.

I have been gazing toward the vestibule
In anxious hope to see his reverend face.

SECOND CITIZEN.

What, know'st thou not how yesterday——

THIRD CITIZEN.

Peace, peace!
He 's here—Give place.

The above. CALLIAS.

CALLIAS.

All true, and real all:

My sleep is fled, but not my hideous dreams.
Ah! there they stand, their baskets full of flowers,
The censers trembling in their timid hands,
All, all the dedicated maids, but one.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Why doth he gaze around? he seems to seek
What he despairs of finding.

CALLIAS.

No, there's none
That taller than the rest draws all regards;
And if they touch their lyres, they will but wake,
With all their art, the memory of that voice
Which is not of their choir——

SECOND CITIZEN.

Ah, poor old man!

CALLIAS.

What! who art thou that dost presume to pity
The father of the peerless Magarita?
I tell thee, insolent! even beside the stake
I shall be prouder of my single child

Than if my wife had teem'd like Niobe
With such as thine.

THIRD CITIZEN.

He hath no children, sir.

CALLIAS.

Would I were like him!—Ah, no—no,—my child!
I know that I'm come forth to see thee die
For this strange God, thy father never worshipp'd;
Yet all my wrath is gone, and half my sorrow,
But nothing of my love. Whate'er thou dost
Is sanctified by being done by thee—
Thy crime hath lost its hatefulness. I pass'd
By Phœbus' shrine, and, or his angry form
Wore less of terror, or my soul had learn'd
To scorn a God, that could not save his faithful
From misery, or teach them to endure it.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

Heard ye——

CALLIAS.

Alas! what hath the old man said,

That ye lower on me with reproachful brows?
Oh friends! I have been dreaming of my daughter,
Dreaming in sleep, which but the soft remembrance
Of her bewitching ways shed o'er mine eyes,
And know not what I think, or what I say.

THE MULTITUDE.

Olybius! Back—back—Olybius!

FIRST CITIZEN.

Rend, rend the heaven with shouts, cast high your caps,
And wave your garlands as the autumn wind
Waves the vine-tendrils.

SECOND CITIZEN.

Citizens, behold him!
With how serene a step he mounts the throne,
As 'twere his birthright to o'crawe mankind
With his superior state.

FOURTH CITIZEN.

How like to Neptune!
That sits upon his lofty car, and rules
All ocean with the shaking of his trident;

The Ægean and the barbarous Pontic seas,
The Tyrrhene and the stormy Adriatic,
And the wide surface of the Libyan main,
To where it breaks on Calpe's rock, rise up
In tumult, or lie strewn in breathless peace
Beneath his nod,—even thus Olybius sways
The surges of yon boundless multitudes.

FIRST CITIZEN.

If Cæsar's self looks from his Capitol
With nobler and more Jove-like brow, mankind
Must shrink into the earth before him.

OLYBIUS.

Callias!

FOURTH CITIZEN.

Thou'rt beckon'd from the crowd by great Olybius.
Happy old man!

CALLIAS.

Accursed happiness!
And will he set my childless misery up
To be a wider gaze?—My Lord, I'm here.

OLYBIUS.

Sit, Callias, here, beneath our feet.

CALLIAS.

'Tis well:

He from whose heart ye rend the sacrifice

Should have an eminent station to behold it.

OLYBIUS (*apart*).

Forbear thy bitter speech—there's hope——

CALLIAS.

What hope?

Alas! I'm now so sunk in misery,

I know not what to hope, or what to fear.

Will it offend thee should I veil my face,

Lest my weak tears reprove thy sterner justice?

OLYBIUS.

Rack me not thus—but—peace!—Let the rites begin.

MACER.

The maids lift up their hymn around the temple.

HYMN TO APOLLO.

I.

Io Pæan! as we sing
Light our fragrant censers swing,
And each laden basket showers
All its painted store of flowers.
Io Pæan! Clarian God!
Come and fill thy proud abode.

Io Pæan! we behold
Nought but walls that flame with gold;
Long retiring colonnades
Crowded with the sacred maids:
Io Pæan! youth divine,
Opes not yet thy secret shrine?

Io Pæan! 'tis not vain;
Far be every foot profane!

Lo, the golden tripod shakes,
And the marble pavement quakes:
Spare, oh spare our dazzled sight,
Lo, unveil'd the Lord of Light!

II.

The God! the God! behold him come
Down through the round and sky-like dome,
In one wide flood of radiant gold
O'er all the kindling statue roll'd;
From his unclouded throne on high
Rushes the effulgent Deity.

The God! the God! in every vein
The panting marble lives again:
The cheeks with beauteous anger glow,
And burns the high exulting brow:
The motion of the irradiate hair
Proclaims Latona's offspring there.

III.

Io Pæan! we adore thee,
Phœbus, low we bow before thee.
Io Pæan! Lycian king!
Syria's crowding myriads sing:
Io Pæan! Heaven and earth
Mingle in our holy mirth.

OLYBIUS.

Now lead the captives forth to hear their doom—
To worship at yon sumptuous shrine, or die.

VOPISCUS.

They come! they come! the universal yell
Of execration follows them along,
Deepening as it approaches, like the roar
Of thunders travelling up the cloudy heavens,
Till o'er our heads it bursts.

OLYBIUS.

What sounds are these,
So melancholy, yet so full of joy,

Like songs of victory round some aged chief,
That in the war hath lost his only son?

The above. The Christians.

CHRISTIAN HYMN.

Oh Jesus! by the mortal pains we bear,
And by the galling chains and garb of shame we wear,
Sad son of Mary! are thy children known:—
And by our flesh with ruthless scourges torn,
By unrelenting man's insatiate hate and scorn,
Crucified Sufferer! are we not thine own?
Oh man of sorrows! and with grief acquainted,
Along the path of woe, like thine, our feet have fainted:
And anguish soon shall choke our parting breath,
And soon our tortured limbs, like thine, be cold in death.

Oh Jesus! by the strength thou givest still,
And by our cheerful scorn of infamy and ill,
Son of the Highest, are thy children known.

By all the exulting joy we inly feel
Beneath the lictor's rod, or headsman's biting steel,
Triumphant Saviour! are we not thine own?
Oh Lord of glory, to the Sire ascended,
Like thine, our anguish soon shall be in rapture ended,
And we shall stand thy starry host among,
And round the sapphire throne swell high the Hosanna song!

MACER.

What, madmen! hath the scourge and torture taught
No wisdom?

OLYBIUS.

By the Gods! look there, look there,
Callias! she wears the bridal robe, and holds
The sacred lyre.

VOPISCUS.

All Antioch waits the doom
Of great Olybius! wherefore doth he pause,
And bend to that old priest?

MACER.

He rises—Peace!

OLYBIUS.

Hear me once more, ye proud rebellious men,
Or never hear again the voice of man.
Behold the temple, where all Antioch serves!
Behold the God himself, whose dreadful brow
Awe-strikes the soul to speechless homage! Serve
And live, or die in earth in fiery anguish,
And be thrust down t' infernal Nemesis,
For Hell's dark Gods t' avenge insulted Heaven.

CHRISTIANS.

The Lord our God is with us, and we fear not.

OLYBIUS.

The Lord your God—where?

FABIUS.

Every where—the worlds
Are all his chambers; this capacious earth
Is but the footstool of his throne, the heavens

Hang in their folds of light t' o'ercanopy
The Omnipresent.

CHARINUS.

Where?—in thunderclouds
Of vengeance, which but wait our voice to launch them
Upon thine head.

OLYBIUS.

We call'd you not before us
To stun our ears with this unholy madness.
The hour of mercy's o'er—or sacrifice
Or die.

CHRISTIANS.

We will not sacrifice to Gods
Wrought by man's hands.

CHARINUS.

Ye laugh, but your mad laughter,
Proud Heathens, shall be changed to scalding tears.

OLYBIUS.

Diodotus! brave soldier, wilt thou fall
In this ignoble warfare?

DIODOTUS.

Rather call it
The noblest conquest Roman ever won.

OLYBIUS.

Charinus! dost accept the proffer'd mercy?

CHARINUS.

False infidel!

OLYBIUS.

'Tis enough.—Calanthias!

CALANTHIAS.

I thought t' have seen, even in my flesh, the Lord
Come down t' avenge his own; but I shall see him
A blazing follower in his kingly train.

OLYBIUS.

Fabius! thine age should teach thee wisdom.

FABIUS.

Youth,
Mine age would only make me fondly mourn,
That I have but the dregs and lees of life
To pour for my Redeemer.

OLYBIUS.

What! are all

So full of frenzy?

CHRISTIANS.

All so full of faith.

OLYBIUS.

Last then to thee, fair Priestess! Art thou still
Resolved with this ungodly crew to share
Our vengeance, or declares that bridal dress
A soft revolt, and falling off to love?

MARGARITA.

To love—but not of man. Oh! pardon me,
Olybius, if my wedding garb afflict
Thy soul with hope; I had but robes of sadness,
Nor would I have my day of victory seem
A day of mourning. But as the earthly bride
Lingers upon the threshold of her home,
And through the mist of parting tears surveys
The chamber of her youth, even so have I
With something of a clinging fondness look'd

Upon the flowers and trees of lovely Daphne.
Sweet waters, that have murmur'd to my prayers;
Banks, where my hand hath cull'd sweet chaplets, once
For rites unholy, since to strew the graves
Of buried saints; and thou, majestic temple!
That wouldst become a purer worship, thou,
How oft from all thine echoing shrines hast answer'd
To my soft lyre—Farewell! for heaven I quit you.
But yet nor you, nor these my loved companions
Once in the twilight dance and morning song,
Though ye are here to hymn my death, not you
Can I forsake without a bleeding spirit.

OLYBIUS.

She weeps! Wise Macer—such a melting nature
Will ne'er endure——

MARGARITA.

Olybius, wilt thou scorn
A criminal's blessing? God repay thy love,
Forgive thy cruelty!——But thou—oh thou!
That liv'st but in my life, no parting bride

But in her ecstasy of sorrow clasps
Her father's knees, and sobs upon his bosom,
That is no more to be her place of refuge.
Father! my fetter'd arms are stretch'd in vain,
But haply They are merciful, and prevent
A keener pang.

CALLIAS.

Let me approach her!

OLYBIUS.

Never
Till she accept our mercy. Sacrifice!
Nor ought of bridal joy or bridal sorrow
Shall be denied thee.
Beautiful! what mean'st thou?
Why dost thou look to yon bright heaven? what seest,
That makes thy full eyes kindle as they gaze,
Undazzled, on the fiery sky?—Give place—
Strike off those misplaced fetters from her limbs:
The sunshine falls around her like a mantle,
The robes of saffron flame like gold—Give place.

MACER.

Great Phœbus conquers! See, she strikes the lyre
With his ecstatic fervour.

CALLIAS.

Peace—oh peace!
And I shall hear once more before I die
That voice on which I've lived these long, long years.
Hark, even the winds are mute to hear her—Peace!

MARGARITA.

What means yon blaze on high?
The empyrean sky
Like the rich veil of some proud fane is rending.
I see the star-paved land,
Where all the angels stand,
Even to the highest height in burning rows ascending.
Some with their wings dispread,
And bow'd the stately head,
As on some mission of God's love departing,
Like flames from midnight conflagration starting;
Behold! the appointed messengers are they,
And nearest earth they wait to waft our souls away.

Higher and higher still
More lofty statures fill
The jasper courts of the everlasting dwelling.
Cherub and Seraph pace
The illimitable space,
While sleep the folded plumes from their white shoulders swelling.
From all the harping throng
Bursts the tumultuous song,
Like the unceasing sounds of cataracts pouring,
Hosanna o'er Hosanna louder soaring;
That faintly echoing down to earthly ears,
Hath seem'd the consort sweet of the harmonious spheres.

Still my rapt spirit mounts,
And lo! beside the founts
Of flowing light Christ's chosen Saints reclining;
Distinct amid the blaze
Their palm-crown'd heads they raise,
Their white robes even through that o'erpowering lustre shining.

Each in his place of state,
Long the bright Twelve have sate,
O'er the celestial Sion high uplifted;
While those with deep prophetic raptures gifted,
Where Life's glad river rolls its tideless streams,
Enjoy the full completion of their heavenly dreams.

Again—I see again
The great victorious train,
The Martyr Army from their toils reposing:
The blood-red robes they wear
Empurpling all the air,
Even their immortal limbs, the signs of wounds disclosing.
Oh, holy Stephen! thou
Art there, and on thy brow
Hast still the placid smile it wore in dying,
When under the heap'd stones in anguish lying
Thy clasping hands were fondly spread to heaven,
And thy last accents pray'd thy foes might be forgiven.

Beyond! ah, who is there
With the white snowy hair?
'Tis he—'tis he, the Son of Man appearing!
At the right hand of One,
The darkness of whose throne
That sun-eyed seraph Host behold with awe and fearing.
O'er him the rainbow springs,
And spreads its emerald wings,
Down to the glassy sea his loftiest seat o'erarching.
Hark—thunders from his throne, like steel-clad armies marching—
The Christ! the Christ commands us to his home!
Jesus, Redeemer, Lord, we come, we come, we come!

THE MULTITUDE.

Blasphemy! blasphemy! She doth profane
Great Phœbus' raptures—tear her off!

OLYBIUS.

Ha! slaves,
Would ye usurp our judgment throne?

MACER.

Be calm.

CALLIAS.

Alas! what mean ye, friends? can such a voice
Offend you? Oh, my child! thou 'rt forced to leave me,
But not to leave me with averted eye,
As though thy father's face were hateful to thee.
But yet I dare not chide thee, and I will not.
I do remember, when thy mother pass'd
I hid my face in my cold shuddering hands,
But still I gaze on thee, and gaze as though
There were a joy in seeing thee even thus.

OLYBIUS.

Macer, thou know'st their separate doom. Lead off
The victims, each to his appointed place.

CHRISTIANS.

Glory! Glory! Glory! the Lord Almighty liveth,
The Lord Almighty doth but take the mortal life he giveth.
Glory! Glory! Glory! the Lord Almighty reigneth,
He who forfeits earthly life, a life celestial gaineth.

CALLIAS.

Why do ye hold me back?—My child! they bind me
With the hard fetters of their arms—thou hear'st not.
Speak! have ye children? have ye ever heard
An infant voice that murmur'd to you "Father!"
Ye Gods, how have ye peopled this fierce Antioch,
That the fond natural love of child and parent
Is made a crime.
Howl, howl; ay, bloody men,
Howl in your Amphitheatre with joy:
Glut your insatiate hearts with human blood.
—Nay, ruthless Prefect, thou'st not sent her there
To perish: not to have her tender limbs
Rent—torn——

The above. OFFICER.

OFFICER.

Great Prefect, he is dead——

CALLIAS.

He—he—
'Twas he, thou said'st?

OFFICER.

Diodotus, great Prefect,
In the arena, as became a soldier,
He stood with undiscolour'd cheek, while lay
The crouching lion stiffening all his mane,
With his white-gleaming teeth, and lashing tail,
Scourging to life the slumbering wrath within him.
But the calm victim look'd upon the people,
Piled o'er each other in the thronging seats,
And utter'd these strange words—" Alas! lost souls,
" There's one that fiercer than yon brinded lion,
" Is prowling round, insatiate to devour——"
Nought more we heard, but one long savage howl
Of the huge monster as he sprung, and then
The grinding of his ravening jaws.

The above. SECOND OFFICER.

CALLIAS.

Another—
And what hast thou to say?

SECOND OFFICER.

Calanthias died
Beneath the scourge; his look toward the sky,
As though he thought the golden clouds conceal'd
Some slow avenger of his cause.

OLYBIUS.

What now?

VOPISCUS.

The voice of triumph clamours up the skies,
And Phœbus' name is mingled with the shouts
Of transport.

CALLIAS.

Can it be?

The above. THIRD OFFICER.

THIRD OFFICER.

Apollo triumphs!

CALLIAS.

Thou say'st not so, she will not sacrifice—
My child! I look'd not yet for this.
What's here?

The above. CHARINUS.

CALLIAS.

Back, thou foul wretch! I rush'd not forth to thee.

CHARINUS.

Foul wretch, indeed! I have forsworn my God.
The blinding flames scorch'd up into mine eyes;
And the false devils murmur'd all around me
Soft sounds of water.

OLYBIUS.

Hurry him away!
On to the altar!

THE MULTITUDE.

Io! Io Pæan!
Io Triumphe!

CHARINUS.

Hah! they point at me,
The angels from the clouds, my blissful brethren,
That mount in radiance: ere they're lost in light,
With sad, and solemn, and reproachful voices
They call me Judas—Judas, that betray'd,

That murder'd his blest master—and himself—
Accurst of men—and outcast from thy fold,
Oh Christ! and for my pride? why then I'll wrap
My soul in stern obduracy, and live
As jocund as the careless Heathen here.
No Peter's tears fill my dry eyes; no beam
Of mercy on my darkening soul—On, on—
And I will laugh, and in my laughter sing
Io Triumphe! Io Pæan!

OLYBIUS.

Now
Give him the knife of sacrifice.

CHARINUS.

Down! Down!
'Tis wet, and reeks with my Redeemer's blood.

OFFICER.

He's fled.

OLYBIUS.

Go after—drag him back.

OFFICER.

'Tis vain.

He cried aloud—" The devil hath wrestled with me,
" And vanquish'd!"—and he plunged the sacred knife
To his unhallow'd heart.

OLYBIUS.

Ignoble wretch!
Who dared not die—yet fear'd to live.
But pause—
What means this deathlike stillness? not a sound
Or murmur from yon countless multitudes.
A pale contagious horror seems to creep
Even to our presence. Men gaze mutely round,
As in their neighbour's face to read the secret
They dare not speak themselves.
Old man! whence com'st thou?
What is't?

CALLIAS.

I know not! I approach'd the place
Of sacrifice, and my spirit shrank within me;
And I came back, I know not how.

OLYBIUS.

Still mute!

Even thus along his vast domain of silence
Dark Pluto gazes, where the sullen spirits
Speak only with fix'd looks, and voiceless motions—
And ye are like them.—Speak to me, I charge you,
Nor let mine own voice, like an evil omen,
Load the hot air, unanswer'd.

CALLIAS.

Hark!

VOPISCUS.

Didst hear it?
That shriek, as though some barbarous foe had scaled
The city walls.

OLYBIUS.

Is't horror or compassion?
Or both?

The above. FOURTH OFFICER.

OLYBIUS.

What means thy hurried look? Speak—speak!
Though thy words blast like lightning.

OFFICER.

Mighty Prefect,
The apostate Priestess Margarita——

OLYBIUS.

How?
Where 's Macer?

OFFICER.

By the dead.

OLYBIUS.

What dead?

OFFICER.

Remove
Thy sword, which thou dost brandish at my throat,
And I shall answer.

OLYBIUS.

Speak, and instantly,
Or I will dash thee down, and trample from thee
Thy hideous secret.

OFFICER.

It is nothing hideous—

'Tis but the enemy of our faith—She died
Nobly, in truth—but——

CALLIAS.

Dead! she is not dead!
Thou liest! I have his oath, the Prefect's oath;
I had forgot it in my fears, but now
I well remember, that she should not die.
Faugh! who will trust in Gods and men like these?

OLYBIUS.

Slave! Slave! dost mock me? Better 'twere for thee
That this be false, than if thou'dst found a treasure
To purchase kingdoms.

OFFICER.

Hear me but a while.
She had beheld each sad and cruel death,
And if she shudder'd, 'twas as one that strives
With nature's soft infirmity of pity,
One look to heaven restoring all her calmness;
Save when that dastard did renounce his faith,
And she shed tears for him. Then led they forth
Old Fabius. When a quick and sudden cry

Of Callias, and a parting in the throng,
Proclaim'd her father's coming. Forth she sprang,
And clasp'd the frowning headsman's knees, and said—
" Thou know'st me, when thou laid'st on thy sick bed
" Christ sent me there to wipe thy burning brow.
" There was an infant play'd about thy chamber,
" And thy pale cheek would smile and weep at once,
" Gazing upon that almost orphan'd child—
" Oh! by its dear and precious memory,
" I do beseech thee, slay me first and quickly:
" 'Tis that my father may not see my death."

CALLIAS.

Oh cruel kindness! and I would have closed
Thine eyes with such a fond and gentle pressure;
I would have smooth'd thy beauteous limbs, and laid
My head upon thy breast, and died with thee.

OLYBIUS.

Good father! once I thought to call thee so,
How do I envy thee this her last fondness;
She had no dying thought of me.—Go on.

OFFICER.

With that the headsman wiped from his swarth cheeks
A moisture like to tears. But she, meanwhile,
On the cold block composed her head, and cross'd
Her hands upon her bosom, that scarce heaved,
She was so tranquil; cautious, lest her garments
Should play the traitors to her modest care.
And as the cold wind touch'd her naked neck,
And fann'd away the few unbraided hairs,
Blushes o'erspread her face, and she look'd up
As softly to reproach his tardiness:
And some fell down upon their knees, some clasp'd
Their hands, enamour'd even to adoration
Of that half-smiling face and bending form.

CALLIAS.

But he—but he—the savage executioner——

OFFICER.

He trembled.

CALLIAS.

Ha! God's blessing on his head!
And the axe slid from out his palsied hand?

OFFICER.

He gave it to another.

CALLIAS.

And——

OFFICER.

It fell.

CALLIAS.

I see it,

I see it like the lightning flash—I see it,

And the blood bursts—my blood!—my daughter's blood!

Off—let me loose.

OFFICER.

Where goest thou?

CALLIAS.

To the Christian,

To learn the faith in which my daughter died,

And follow her as quickly as I may.

OLYBIUS, MACER, *and the Rest.*

OLYBIUS.

Macer! is this thy faithful service?

MACER.

Ah,

So rapid——

OLYBIUS.

Not a word! Thou think'st I'll stoop
To dash thee to the earth—But I'm so sick
Of this accursed pomp, I will not use
Its privilege of vengeance.
Fatal trappings
Of proud authority, that like the robe
Of Nessus shine and burn into the entrails!—
Supremacy! whose great prerogative
Is to be blasted by superior misery!
No more will I possess the fatal power
Of murdering those I love. All-ruling sceptre!
That wert mine instrument of bloodshed, down!
Mine hand shall never grasp thee more. Vopiscus,
Assume the vacant Prefect's seat, and be
Curst like myself—with sway—I cannot wish thee
A doom more hateful—
Who comes here?

OFFICER.

Great Prefect!

The enchantress Margarita by her death
Hath wrought upon the changeful populace,
That they cry loudly on the Christians' God.
Embolden'd multitudes from every quarter
Throng forth, and in the face of day proclaim
Their lawless faith. They have ta'en up the body,
And hither, as in proud ovation, bear it
With clamour and with song. All Antioch crowds
Applauding round them—they are here, behold them.

CHRISTIAN HYMN.

Sing to the Lord! let harp, and lute, and voice
Up to the expanding gates of Heaven rejoice,
  While the bright Martyrs to their rest are borne;
Sing to the Lord! their blood-stain'd course is run,
And every head its diadem hath won,
  Rich as the purple of the summer morn;
Sing the triumphant champions of their God,
While burn their mounting feet along their sky-ward
    road.

Sing to the Lord! for her in Beauty's prime
Snatch'd from this wintery earth's ungenial clime,
In the eternal spring of Paradise to bloom;
For her the world display'd its brightest treasure,
And the airs panted with the songs of pleasure.
Before earth's throne she chose the lowly tomb,
The vale of tears with willing footsteps trod,
Bearing her Cross with thee, incarnate Son of God!

Sing to the Lord! it is not shed in vain,
The blood of martyrs! from its freshening rain
High springs the Church like some fount-shadowing palm;
The nations crowd beneath its branching shade,
Of its green leaves are kingly diadems made,
And wrapt within its deep embosoming calm
Earth sinks to slumber like the breezeless deep,
And war's tempestuous vultures fold their wings and sleep.

Sing to the Lord! no more the Angels fly
Far in the bosom of the stainless sky
The sound of fierce licentious sacrifice.
From shrined alcove, and stately pedestal,
The marble Gods in cumbrous ruin fall,
Headless in dust the awe of nations lies;
Jove's thunder crumbles in his mouldering hand,
And mute as sepulchres the hymnless temples stand.

Sing to the Lord! from damp prophetic cave
No more the loose-hair'd Sybils burst and rave;
Nor watch the augurs pale the wandering bird:
No more on hill or in the murky wood,
Mid frantic shout and dissonant music rude,
In human tones are wailing victims heard;
Nor fathers by the reeking altar stone
Cowl their dark heads t' escape their childrens' dying
groan.

Sing to the Lord! no more the dead are laid
In cold despair beneath the cypress shade,
To sleep the eternal sleep, that knows no morn:
There, eager still to burst death's brazen bands,
The Angel of the Resurrection stands;
While, on its own immortal pinions borne,
Following the Breaker of the emprisoning tomb,
Forth springs the exulting soul, and shakes away its gloom.

Sing to the Lord! the desert rocks break out,
And the throng'd cities, in one gladdening shout;
The farthest shores by pilgrim step explored;
Spread all your wings, ye winds, and waft around,
Even to the starry cope's pale waning bound,
Earth's universal homage to the Lord;
Lift up thine head, imperial Capitol,
Proud on thy height to see the banner'd Cross unroll.

Sing to the Lord! when Time itself shall cease,
And final Ruin's desolating peace
  Enwrap this wide and restless world of man;
When the Judge rides upon the enthroning wind,
And o'er all generations of mankind
  Eternal Vengeance waves its winnowing Fan;
To vast Infinity's remotest space,
While ages run their everlasting race,
Shall all the Beatific Hosts prolong,
Wide as the glory of the Lamb, the Lamb's triumphant
  song!

THE END.

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